



*Shri. Sastri*

The Right Honourable

# V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI

P.C., C.H., LL.D., D.LITT.

A Political Biography

P. KODANDA RAO



ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE

BOMBAY . CALCUTTA . NEW DELHI . MADRAS

LUCKNOW .



PRINTED IN INDIA

BY L. S. DORAISWAMY AT W. Q. JUDGE PRESS (DIVISION OF  
INTERNATIONAL BOOK HOUSE PRIVATE LTD., BOMBAY),  
BANGALORE, AND PUBLISHED BY P. S. JAYASINGHE,  
ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOMBAY 1

**Dedicated**  
**with love and regard**  
**to**  
**my friend and helper**  
**H. Gopalaswami Aiyengar**



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## *FOREWORD*

It is a great service which Mr. Kodanda Rao has done by giving us all an authoritative political biography of the Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri, one of the most brilliant among those who in the first decade of this century dedicated themselves entirely to the cause of Indian Freedom. I have the good fortune to be able to claim him as a friend from those early times although we took different channels of political work. I am glad as a friend that something has been done to keep his memory before the public of today. The preliminary work of a great many patriots led up to the final assault on the British regime in India. Srinivasa Sastri's share in this work can be seen in Mr. Kodanda Rao's book. They were members, both of them, of the great Servants of India Society founded by Gokhale.

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI



## PREFACE

"I have called Gokhale my political Guru. Therefore, Sastriar is a fellow disciple. And what a disciple and yet an amiable usurper!!! I was to have the honour of being Gokhale's successor but I found in Sastriar a worthy usurper to whom I made a willing surrender. . . . I had and have no gifts which Gokhale had and Sastriar has in luxurious abundance."

Mahatma Gandhi<sup>1</sup>

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI, before he ever was acclaimed as "Mahatma Gandhi," had himself acclaimed Gopal Krishna Gokhale as "Mahatma Gokhale," enthroned him in his heart as the King among his heroes and claimed him as his Raja Guru or Political Master. Gokhale founded the Servants of India Society in 1905 for the service of India in the secular field in the spirit in which religious work was undertaken. In the Preamble to the Constitution of the Society he said: "Public life must be spiritualised. Love of country must so fill the heart that all else shall appear as of little moment by its side. A fervent patriotism which rejoices at every opportunity of sacrifice for the motherland, a dauntless heart which refuses to be turned back from its object by difficulty or danger, a deep faith in the purpose of Providence which nothing can shake—equipped with these the worker must start on his mission and reverently seek the joy which comes of spending oneself in the service of one's country." Gandhi intended to join the Society and expected to succeed Gokhale as its head. In the event, V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, who had joined the Society in 1907 and became the right-hand man of Gokhale, succeeded him in 1915. Gandhi and Sastri continued to be great friends personally, though they differed in politics. Sastri was per-

<sup>1</sup> Foreword to *My Master Gokhale*, Model Publications, Madras, 1946.



haps the one friend outside the circle of his disciples whom Gandhi consulted on critical occasions and whose advice he valued, though he often found himself unable to accept it. In his letter to Sastri of November 24, 1932, from the Yerwada Prison, Gandhi said: "Your criticism soothes; your silence makes me nervous. Time only deepens my love for you; our differences appear to me superficial. Deep down I feel and touch the meeting ground that is precious." When in 1923 Gandhi was asked if he would like to see any person before he was put under chloroform for being operated upon for appendicitis, he asked for Sastri. To Sastri was entrusted the delicate task of persuading Gandhi to go to the Second Round Table Conference between India and Britain in 1931. Sastri pressed that Gandhi should be invited to the peace conference following the conclusion of the Second World War as the foremost apostle of peace and non-violence.

Sastri, who was born in the same year as Gandhi but some ten days earlier, was, unlike Gandhi, born very poor; so poor indeed that, in opposing the doubling of the salt tax in 1923, he feelingly recalled that his mother had on one occasion to decline a gift of green mangoes because she could not buy the salt necessary to pickle them in! When he joined the Servants of India Society he renounced all ambitions of acquiring wealth and power and exercising patronage. By the sheer force of his personality, he rose to great eminence and influence in the affairs of India and the Commonwealth. He was one of the prime movers of the National Liberal Federation of India, which stood for liberalism and constitutionalism in Indian politics as against extremism and direct action. His was perhaps the single greatest contribution from the Indian side to the evolution of the Indian Reforms Act of 1919, promoted by the Rt. Hon. E. S. Montagu, then Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet. He was successively a member of the Madras Legislative Council, the Imperial Legislative Council and the Council of State. He sat with the Prime Ministers of Britain and the British Dominions at the Imperial Conference in London in 1921. He was a member of the Indian Delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva in 1921 and the Limitation of Armaments Conference in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., in 1922, and toured the British Dominions of Australia, Canada and New Zea-

land in 1922 and was received almost like royalty. He was a member of the Round Table Conferences between Britain and India in 1930 and 1931 and of the two Round Table Conferences between India and South Africa in 1927 and 1932 and in between he was the Agent of the Government of India in South Africa. He was made a member of the British Privy Council, and was accorded the Freedom of the City of London and of the City of Edinburgh. He was made a Companion of Honour, but respectfully declined the offer of K.C.S.I. Twice he was offered the Cecil Rhodes Memorial Lectureship in Oxford, but declined the honour for reasons of health.

Sastri owed his influence to his high and noble character, which evoked trust and confidence even among his opponents. He was noted, and even criticised by his friends, for his "cross-bench mind"; he was so scrupulously fair to his opponents that it was said against him that he could put his opponent's case better than his own! When he wrote or spoke he tried to persuade by soft appeal to noble instincts and shrank from stinging by sharp words. Having suffered from uncharitable criticism, he was charitable in judging others. Because of this habit of his, on the rare occasions when he expressed himself with some warmth, he created a striking effect. One such rare occasion was his fighting speech, rarely excelled in argument and oratory, attacking the Rowlatt Bill in the Indian Legislative Council in 1919, which created a profound impression. Another such occasion was his speech in Bangalore in 1923 when the British Government exchanged 'British' for 'Boer' racial policies in Kenya; he lashed out in white-heat indignation and roused India by his warning: "Kenya Lost—All is Lost."

He was among the greatest masters of the English language of his time. He acquired the mastery without studying the language in England or under English teachers in India and captivated his audiences by his superb eloquence. The late Lord Balfour, himself a great master of the English language, heard Sastri's speech at the League of Nations and said that he then realised the heights to which the English language could rise. H. Wilson Harris, President of the International Association of Journalists, who was accredited to the League, said that until Sastri spoke, he was noticed only for his Indian complexion and dress; but, thereafter, he was on everybody's lips as perhaps the foremost orator

work to a select audience whom he enlightened by his objective evaluation, without however offending the devout, and whom he moved by his eloquent readings and striking comments.

The Kenya campaign in 1923 and his utter disappointment at the British Government's decision broke his heart. Since then he suffered from acute angina pectoris for the rest of his life. Observing strict diet and avoiding as far as possible emotional excitement, he continued his public work. Just a few weeks before his death on April 16, 1946, he issued a very strong statement attacking General Smuts's apologia for racialism in South Africa. He died with his boots on, as it were.

Sastri was an eminent scholar as well as a statesman; he was one of the elect among the great builders of India and the pillars of the Commonwealth.

## II

Gokhale addressed a public meeting of the students of Madras in 1913. He spoke feelingly of the unsatisfactory state of public life in India and made a fervent appeal for a few University graduates who would give up the ordinary ambitions of life and dedicate themselves to the service of India. I registered a secret vow to join the Servants of India Society. But by the time I took my degree Gokhale had passed away and Sastri had succeeded him. I called on Sastri and sought admission. With fatherly concern, he told me that I was too young and too fresh from college to take such a lifelong step, and that I had yet nothing to give up to join the Society, and advised me to make good elsewhere for some years and come back to him, if I thought fit. Six years after, in 1921, when I had something to give up as one proof of my earnestness, he admitted me as Probationer for the usual period of one year, along with several others. But when the year was over, he admitted the others but held back my admission and asked me to work with him as his personal secretary and subtly tested me and my views. I told him frankly that the policy and programme of Non-cooperation then propagated by Mahatma Gandhi appealed to me, as to many young men, but that I felt that Sastri and the Servants of India Society must have good

reasons for opposing it, which I would study seriously and sincerely. If I was not satisfied, I would eschew political work and confine myself to the non-controversial social work which the Society considered as important as political work; but join the Society I would, because of my vow. Finally, he admitted me in May, 1922, in Simla at the residence of the Rt. Hon. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, then Law Member of the Government of India. From then on he often chose me to be his personal secretary. I served him in that capacity for about ten years in India, England, South Africa and East Africa. I lived with him and his wife as a member of the family and enjoyed his confidence and was bound to him, as he put it, "by the close tie of an affection that nothing can dim and many dear memories of journeys, anxieties, trials and enjoyments in common."

On one occasion, I was critical of some actions of his. Not having the courage to tell him, I wrote to him. I was fearful of a severe rebuke. Instead, I received congratulations! In the course of a long letter he said:

"I can imagine the struggle through which you passed before deciding to place those letters in my cabin. To one of your fine sensibilities much anguish must have attended the process by which you convinced yourself that it was necessary to risk hurting feelings rather than let serious doubts prey on your mind. You have done the right thing.

"It is not proper to take offence unless one is positively sure that offence is intended. I have tried to act on this rule. In your case there is no proof, short of a sworn confession, that can induce me to believe that you meant me to suffer. It was, I see, a high sense of duty that prompted you. I honour you. . . .

"Having been with me in a most intimate and trusted relation, you have seen me through and through. Not many can stand such close inspection. I have marvelled at your gifts of patience, toleration and reticence and regarded myself as peculiarly blest in you.

"*I have broken an idol or two in my life and know what anguish it costs.* You have my heartfelt sympathy. Let me recall what the poet says: 'Remember that in the strict course of justice none of us should see salvation. We all pray for mercy and that same prayer does teach us all to render deeds of mercy.'



## EARLY LIFE

"I can speak with personal knowledge of these people, because, Sir, as I will admit—it being no crime—that I have lived very close to this line of subsistence. For many years when I was a little boy, the prospect of starvation was a familiar companion, and among my sharpest and bitterest recollections today is this circumstance that one year, when money was scarce and among the necessities of life salt was dear, my poor mother was obliged to decline a gift of mangoes because she could not afford to purchase the salt necessary to pickle it."

THUS spoke the Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri in the Council of State on March 23, 1923, when the Indian Finance Bill proposed to impose a permanent salt tax. It may be added that orthodox convention, which permitted a gift of mangoes, did not permit a gift of salt. It was the measure of the poverty of the family that it could not afford to buy salt enough to pickle a gift of mangoes!

Sastri was born on September 22, 1869, at Valangimon, a village near the town of Kumbakonam in the Madras Presidency. He was the fourth of seven children and was preceded by three sisters and followed by three brothers. His parents were very orthodox Brahmins; his mother was pious and religious, and his father was a great scholar in Sanskrit and officiated as a priest at religious ceremonies.

Sastri was a student of the Native High School, Kumbakonam, from the Infant right up to the Matriculation class. He was an expert at games like swimming and marbles and often stood first in competitions. At the age of fourteen, when he was still in the Matriculation class, his marriage to Srimati Parvatiamma was proposed by his

parents. He was in a fix. At that time, Hindu marriage reform was a live subject. His teachers at school had practically compelled the boys to take a solemn vow that they would not marry till they were over eighteen years of age. It was no doubt unfair to administer such vows to immature boys rather than to their mature parents. Sastri was under the protection of his parents. Should he obey them or honour the vow he had taken? His parents, who did not take his vow seriously, prevailed, and the marriage took place. Twelve years later Parvatiamma passed away, leaving a son, Sankaran, a year and a half old.

Sastri passed his Matriculation examination in 1883, when he was hardly fifteen years old. He stood thirteenth in the Madras Presidency, which entitled him to free education in the First Year Arts Course in college. He came out first in the F.A. examination in 1885, which enabled him to have free education for the Bachelor of Arts degree. He took his B.A. degree in 1888, standing first in the whole Presidency in Sanskrit, with a first class in English. He won a prize of Rs. 350 and a gold medal for proficiency in English. His father had a feast to celebrate his son's success, and invited a few friends, who were also Sanskrit scholars. As usual on such occasions, there was some chanting of Sanskrit verses. Sastri challenged the correctness of the grammar of one of the verses, which had a pronoun without a preceding noun. The venerable scholars were scandalised by the irreverent impudence and boldness of the youngster. His father berated him; his success had gone to his head! Duly humbled, Sastri swore that he would never, never again correct other people's incorrect grammar in any language.

But it was not to be. For, he and three of his friends successfully challenged the correctness of some passages in *English Grammar*, by J. C. Nesfield, which was a textbook in High Schools. It created a sensation that Indians should correct the English grammar of an English grammarian! Very early in his life, Sastri evinced and displayed great sensitiveness to correctness in grammar and pronunciation. An English Dictionary was his constant companion throughout his life, always at his elbow, as it were; and it became his habit to study it pretty constantly.

Soon after his graduation, he became a teacher in the Municipal High School, Mayavaram, on a salary of Rs. 50

a month. He then persuaded his father to give up his profession as a priest and maintained the whole of the big family of parents, sisters and brothers and nephews. He financed the schooling of his brothers without ever asking for any fee concessions for them, which he could have got for the asking. He came under the fatherly and efficient influence of the Headmaster of the School, who shaped him on the threshold of his career. Among his students at the time was T. R. Venkatarama Sastri, who became his life-long friend personally and his close collaborator in public life.

Sastri joined the Teachers' Training College, Madras, in 1891, and excelled not only in studies but also in extracurricular activities like debates, drama and sports. During his time in the College, he had some encounters with its Principal, A. A. Hall, an Englishman. While appreciating Sastri's grammar and pronunciation of English, Hall reprimanded other students for their lapses. Sastri resented the reprimand and remonstrated with the Principal that it was unfair of him to expect Indian students to speak English correctly because it was not their mother-tongue and they did not learn it from Englishmen. He then turned the tables by respectfully pointing out that Hall himself had mispronounced some English words! Hall flushed and retorted that, as an Englishman, he knew English pronunciation better than his Indian student. Sastri respectfully challenged him to consult the Dictionary. On doing so, Hall gracefully acknowledged that he was wrong and complimented Sastri. On another occasion, Sastri resented an adverse remark of Hall against an Indian teacher in the College, which, he thought, was undeserved. Hall realised his mistake and requested Sastri to intervene and restore good relations between the two. Sastri appreciated the nobility of Hall. A lesser Principal might have victimised him.

Sastri was appointed First Assistant Teacher in the Salem College in 1893 and began to take interest in public affairs. He came in contact with C. Vijayaraghavachari who was then known as the "Salem Hero," and joined his party in a dispute with the Madras Government and wrote to the *Hindu* several articles on the subject, some of which were published in its editorial columns. Because he was a Municipal servant, Sastri was threatened with disciplinary action



for criticising the Government in the public press.

After two years in Salem, Sastri joined the Pachaiyappa's High School, Madras, as Assistant Teacher in English, and in 1902 became the Headmaster of the Hindu High School, Triplicane, Madras, which he served with great zeal and efficiency and won for it the distinction of the Model High School in the Presidency. He edited the *Education Review* and was one of the sponsors of the *Indian Review*, edited by his great friend, G. A. Natesan.

While at the Hindu High School, Sastri came to know that the Negapatam High School, managed by a committee of non-official Indians, ran into difficulties and was looking for an efficient Headmaster to salvage it, but had not the money to engage one. At that time, schools run by foreign Christian Missionaries had greater pull with Government which was British, and received better financial help from Government than those run by Indians. Sastri suggested in the *Education Review* that Indian managements should combine together and thereby create greater impression on Government and get better grants. At the same time, the schools should pool their resources in men and money, the stronger helping the weaker. He himself volunteered to serve the Negapatam school on a lower salary than he was getting in Madras. The managements of both the schools dissuaded him from the sacrifice.

About that time, the Principalship of the Pithapuram Raja's College, Kakinada, fell vacant. R. Venkataratnam Naidu and Sastri applied for it. The former was tutor to the Raja and, like him, was a staunch member of the Brahmo Samaj and advocated religious instruction in educational institutions and was, in consequence, favoured by a section of the managing committee. There was, however, a strong party against him. It favoured Sastri. It tried to persuade him to agree to religious education but in the Hindu faith. Sastri declined, as he was opposed to religious instruction in educational institutions on principle and had advocated the application of the Conscience Clause in Christian Missionary schools and colleges. He refused to canvass for the post. On the other hand, he felt it an irony of fate that he should compete with Venkataratnam Naidu, whom he considered as his superior in age, experience and teaching capacity. So, he wrote a confidential letter to one of his supporters that it would be better in the interests of

the pupils if his rival was chosen, and pleaded that in any event the contest should be conducted on a high level. Venkataratnam was chosen by the casting vote of the chairman. Subsequently, he came upon Sastri's confidential letter and wrote to Sastri in high appreciation of his elevated approach to the matter.

Social reform, particularly of Hindu Brahmin marriage, was very much to the fore in those days. As has been already noted, Sastri, as a High School student, had taken a vow that he would not marry till he was over eighteen years of age. He could not, however, keep it. But that incident kindled his interest in the reform of Hindu marriage. He advocated, by speech and writing, post-puberty marriage for Brahmin girls, among whom pre-puberty marriage was ordained. He published in 1906 a pamphlet, under the authority of the Madras Hindu Association, on *Marriage after Puberty according to Hindu Sastras*, in which he argued that the Hindu *Sastras* did not forbid such marriages and that post-puberty marriages were in vogue in the olden days. He quoted extensively from the ancient Sanskrit texts in support of his thesis. After carrying on a vigorous propaganda for some years in the press and the platform, Sastri proposed to secure legislative sanction for post-puberty marriages. He was, however, persuaded to drop it for the reason that such marriages were increasingly common and were quietly accepted without fuss or protest, and that if legislation were proposed, it would provoke orthodoxy to active opposition and perhaps invite defeat.

Sastri's second wife was Srimati Lakshmiamma. He had two daughters by her. The elder was married after puberty; the younger died before her marriage could be thought of. Lakshmiamma passed away in June, 1934.

Another activity which engaged Sastri during his days as Headmaster of the Hindu High School was Co-operation. He was the prime mover in starting the Triplicane Urban Co-operative Society, which has grown steadily into a flourishing institution.

## *GOKHALE, GANDHI AND SASTRI*

GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE founded the Servants of India Society in Poona in 1905 with a view to training national missionaries for the service of India in the secular field in the spirit in which religious work was undertaken. He was the chief disciple of Mahadev Govind Ranade, who was a judge of the Bombay High Court and was the main inspirer of all progressive movements in western India at the time. In politics he was the philosopher of Liberalism, Constitutionalism and Gradualism, as opposed to Extremism, Direct Action and Revolution, which appealed to the school of Nationalists, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The Tablets of Indian Liberalism were inscribed by Ranade:

"The spirit of Liberalism implies freedom from race and creed prejudices and steady devotion to all that seeks justice between man and man, giving to the rulers the loyalty that is due to the law they are bound to administer, but securing at the same time to the people the equality which is their right under the law. Moderation implies the conditions of never vainly aspiring after the impossible or after the remote, but striving each day to take the next step in the order of natural growth by doing work that lies nearest to our hands in a spirit of compromise and fairness."

This philosophy guided Gokhale. Nevertheless, he was shadowed by the agents of the Criminal Investigation Department who, perhaps to be on the safe side, presumed every Indian public worker to be either an active or potential seditionist or anarchist. Gokhale, who had parted company with Tilak, was like him a Maharashtrian, a Brahmin

and a Chitpavan—a combination which was *bête noire* to the British bureaucracy in those days of Indian unrest, which the Government of Lord Curzon, Viceroy and Governor-General, had done much to provoke and exacerbate by a series of irritants to Indian nationalism. It was, therefore, somewhat of a hazardous venture for him to found a society of political *sanyasis* at that time and in Poona. In addition to taking counsel with some British friends, he took the precaution of taking into his confidence a couple of high British officials of the Bombay Government. Nevertheless, Gokhale could not be sure that the Servants of India Society was not looked upon by the British bureaucracy as a secret cell of sedition and subversion, deserving suppression.

In founding the Society, Gokhale printed a "confidential" pamphlet containing its Preamble and Rules. Sastri came upon a copy of it soon after, and it radically changed his future career. Recalling the occasion years later, Sastri said that the language and sentiments, no less than the ideals set in it, made a special appeal to him. When noble thoughts were united with noble words, they had a way of seeming to simple minds as their own. Again and again he would ask himself: had he not been reaching out for something like it, though he could never have given it clear expression?

He wrote a sketch of the life of Gokhale, which was published in the *Indian Review* in 1905 on the eve of the Benares session of the Indian National Congress, over which Gokhale, at the early age of thirty-nine, presided. It was a remarkable tribute to Gokhale:

"At an age when other public men place a trembling step on the first rung of the ladder of fame, Mr. Gokhale has mounted to its very top. . . . If we look for the noblest type of patriotism, that which impels to sacrifice of self and takes joy therein, what name can be placed besides his, save only that of Dadabhai [Naoroji]? . . . Sacrifice and *sanyasa* are ideas that have a peculiar charm for the Hindus and have been brilliantly illustrated in all ages of their history. Mr. Gokhale had added a new significance to these expressions in keeping with the more spacious times we live in. A sacrificer of old, even when he gave up his self, had an eye to the joys of *swarga*, and a *sanyasin*, though he renounced the world, often strove only for his own salvation.

From Mr. Gokhale's sacrifice and *sanyasa* all thought of self is removed. Would that more of us sacrificed on that altar! Would that there were more of such political *sanyasis*! All patriotic prayer is summed up in that wish."<sup>1</sup>

Sastri decided to be one of the political *sanyasis* in the footsteps of Gokhale. He, therefore, attended the Benares session of the Indian National Congress as a delegate, primarily to meet his hero, and applied for admission to the Servants of India Society. In his application he said:

"I am a schoolmaster in Triplicane, with about 17 years' service. I graduated B.A. in 1888, and now am 37 years old. My age, I fear, may be against me, as I may not have many years more to give to the service of my country. Nor have I the confidence that I can do very much in the few years that lie before me. Such as I am, however, I offer myself and hope to be accepted. I don't write this letter under an impulse of the moment; but the idea has been long in my mind, and it was for this purpose chiefly that I made up my mind to come here as a delegate."<sup>2</sup>

Not receiving a prompt reply, the impatient Sastri sought the good offices of V. Krishnaswami Aiyer, a friend of his and of Gokhale, to commend his application. In February, 1906, he was asked by Gokhale to meet him in Poona for a few days to talk it over. Sastri was with him during Easter. In recalling the meeting years later in 1925, Sastri said:

"One does not like to write with fulness or freedom on what is cherished reverently in one's inmost heart... His ideals quickly possessed you; you found yourself overwhelmed by his ardour... All the time some subtle element in his personality filled me with the conviction that Poona was the proper ground for all selfless work; that the Society was the first chosen instrument for the uplift of the motherland and that he was the leader best fitted to allure the youth of India to brighter worlds. I felt the answering glow in me, but what with my inexpressive face, what with the sudden paralysis that overtook my tongue, he might have thought me a mere clod of earth. The words were miles away when I needed them most."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *My Master Gokhale*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Relaxing on an evening in the courtyard under a brilliant moon, Gokhale waxed eloquent about the primacy of Poona among the cities of India. His Master, Ranade, had called her the metropolis of India, and Bombay, a mere suburb of Poona! As if to clinch the point, he claimed that Poona alone could boast of a sky like the one they saw overhead! This last was a little too much for Sastri, notwithstanding his reverence for Gokhale. Half protestingly, he said that he had seen such clear nights in Madras as well. "The spell broke and the magician became dumb." "I am sure Gokhale forgave me," recalled Sastri, "but I haven't yet."<sup>4</sup>

Before leaving Poona, Sastri promised to join the Society as soon as possible, though Gokhale advised him to take time and think it over. The Secretary of the Society made the following note in his records: "Mr. Srinivasa Sastri, Headmaster of the Hindu High School, Madras, had come here to see our First Member, and I am glad to announce that he has finally given his word to join us in the month of September, when our First Member returns from England. As we are at present constituted, I think we may well congratulate ourselves on the new recruit we have secured to our ranks."<sup>5</sup>

When Sastri resigned from the Hindu High School in 1906 to join the Society, there was a great demonstration to honour him, to appreciate his services to the School, to express sorrow at his impending departure and to wish him well in his new adventure of political *sanyas*, for the service of the motherland. In his reply, Sastri, who was a great student and lover of the *Ramayana*, recalled the episode when Kausalya, having importuned in vain to the contrary, finally consented to Rama exiling himself to honour his father's wish and blessed him:

*Yam palayasi dharmam tvam dhritya cha niyamena cha  
Sa vai Raghava sardula dharmastvam abhirakshatu.*

(Let Dharma keep thee from harm, the same Dharma that thou followest with such steadfastness and self-denial.)

His speech, particularly the appropriate quotation, deeply moved the vast audience.

Sastri could not join the Society at once as he was not relieved of his Headmastership for some months. During

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

the prolonged interval of "mortgaged membership" of the Society, pressures were brought to bear on him to change his mind. His parents were resigned after a struggle. Friends were doubtful about the wisdom of his action; un-friends were cynical and foes were sceptical. None encouraged him openly. Even V. Krishnaswami Aiyer maintained benevolent neutrality; he appreciated Sastri's act, but shrank from urging him to a sacrifice which he was not himself prepared to make. Meanwhile, rumours were spread that the delay was due to Sastri's second thoughts, that he shrank from the financial sacrifice at the last moment, and that Krishnaswami Aiyer had to subsidise him to the extent of about ten thousand rupees to overcome his reluctance! Referring to this canard he said, in 1926:

"The story that it was on his persuasion that I changed from schoolmaster to Servant of India is entirely baseless. Long afterwards he told me of altercations with his wife during which she had blamed him for bidding others do that which he was unwilling to do himself. When she desired him to use his influence and save me for my family, he said in self-defence, 'It is more than I can do. It is hard enough, when a noble deed is done, not to cry *shabash*; to try to dissuade the doer is a crime of which I will not be guilty.' Some one started the fable that when Gokhale's call came I was slow to respond on account of my poverty, and that to overcome my scruples, Mr. Krishnaswami Aiyer paid me a sum of ten thousand rupees. In the then state of Madras the fable gained some currency. If it was denied and denounced with earnestness, the calumniator was not silenced; he only said, 'Wait and see. Mr. K's will contains a provision to that effect.' He had been dead ten years when this yarn was revived and published on the eve of my departure to London for the Imperial Conference of 1921. If a prompt repudiation could have established the truth, it should not have proceeded from me or from any one intimately connected with me. At this distance of time I confess to a feeling of mild surprise and sorrow that so many should have been willing to credit the story obviously meant to besmirch a fraternity of three men, one of whom was ready to sell himself, another to buy him and the third to take unto his bosom an article so sold and bought."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

The attempt to besmirch him was perhaps the measure of the eminence he had already attained at the time in the public life of Madras.

At the instance of Gokhale, Sastri attended in December, 1906, the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, over which Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India, presided. Gokhale mentioned the Society to Dadabhai and introduced to him Sastri and other members. Dadabhai warmly congratulated Gokhale on founding the Society, and recalled that he himself had cherished a similar ambition and gave his blessings to the members.

Sastri was formally admitted to the Society on January 15, 1907, in a house on Rowland Road, Ballygunge, Calcutta. Gokhale administered the seven vows of the Society: "Gokhale's deportment was solemn and inspired me with something like awe. As I pronounced the phrases of each vow after him, I was seized with terrible misgivings as to my being able to keep them in a tolerable degree. But the trial was quickly over."

Sastri's public work as a member of the Society began the next day when Gokhale asked him to tour East Bengal and relaxed the rule that members of the Society should not address public meetings or write in the public press for the first five years of their membership of the Society, which was their period of training in public work. Sastri helped Gokhale in his work as Secretary of the Indian National Congress and as member of the Indian Legislative Council and attended every important speech of Gokhale since then.

Sastri was present at the Surat session of the Congress in December, 1907, and witnessed the split in it and the confusion and disorder that accompanied it. Leaders like Pherozeshah Mehta, D. E. Wacha, Gokhale and Krishnaswami Aiyer decided to reconstitute the Congress and held the next session in Madras in 1908. In that connection, Sastri toured the Madras Presidency to win support to the re-constituted Convention of the Congress, of which he was appointed a Secretary.

Gokhale worked strenuously and worked his assistants equally strenuously. He would sit up the whole night and make his assistants do likewise. In a speech he made in Nagpur on March 3, 1935, Sastri recalled an incident of 1912 when Gokhale had introduced his Elementary Educa-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.



tion Bill in the Indian Legislative Council and wanted a particular quotation which he could not locate. Sastri sat for hours and thought that he found it. Gokhale said that it was only ninety per cent of what he was looking for and asked Sastri to try again for the hundred per cent. Sastri was unable to find it. Gokhale did not use what he found. Somewhat hurt that all his labours were wasted, Sastri passed on his find to another member of the Council who was glad to have it and used it. Gokhale was surprised and frowned on Sastri who was in the Visitors' Gallery. Sastri turned his face away! The same evening, when Gokhale asked for an explanation, Sastri tactfully said that, while the passage was not good enough for Gokhale, it was good enough for his colleague who used it! Gokhale agreed and thought that it was well used.

Though he was only four years younger, Sastri treated Gokhale with great respect and reverence as his Master. Gokhale also treated Sastri with marked consideration and as a colleague rather than as a subordinate. During his first visit to Poona in the Easter of 1906, Gokhale, who was President of the Poona Municipality, introduced Sastri to Mr. (later Sir) M. Visvesvaraya, then Engineer in charge of the Poona Water-Works. After surveying Sastri's dress with "compassionate disapproval," he said: "You see, how correctly he [Visvesvaraya] is dressed; he is equally precise in his work and in his engagements. If I had such men to deal with in all my business, I could wish for nothing better."

Gokhale's delicate hint about dress and appearance was however lost on Sastri. Lord Sydenham, when he was Governor of Bombay, suspected that the Society was a cover for seditionists and played with the idea of suppressing it. To stave off the catastrophe and to let the Governor know the members and their work by personal contact, Gokhale invited him and his wife to tea at the Society. That morning, Gokhale discussed with Sastri the arrangements for the tea and invited him to sit with him at the table of the chief guests. Sastri noticed that Gokhale had something more on his mind but hesitated to say it. Again and again, Gokhale essayed to speak, but hung back with evident embarrassment. Finally, he clinched the brewing crisis by suggesting that Sastri might take a shave before meeting their Excellencies! Having released the words, Gokhale retreated

to his room, somewhat abashed at the liberty he had taken with Sastri. Sastri was terribly upset and blamed himself no end for not anticipating Gokhale's suggestion and for having caused him such great embarrassment. In distress and in tears, he returned to his room, only to find a brand new safety-razor on his table—a gift from Gokhale! As long as Sastri used that razor, he was reminded of the occasion.

Sastri's sartorial reformation was not complete. He used to wear the typical South Indian dress, the *dhoti*, the shirt and coat, the turban and *chappals*. He was not particular about the cut of his coat and of dress generally, while Gokhale was very prim and proper. His dress created a problem when he was assisting Gokhale in his work in the Indian Legislative Assembly, Calcutta. On one occasion, he was refused admission to the legislative chamber by the European sergeant at the gate on the ground that he was not "properly dressed"! Hurt by the insult to the *dhoti*, Sastri returned home and cogitated whether he should request Gokhale to make an issue of the dignity and status of the *dhoti* then and there, or let him concentrate on his Education Bill and himself submit to the indignity of a pair of trousers and shoes! Finally, he chose the latter alternative, consoling himself with the thought that one day the *dhoti* would come into its own in the highest social and official circles in India. Next day, he presented himself in trousers and shoes, and was readily admitted to the legislative chamber!

In 1907, the year of his admission to the Servants of India Society, Sastri visited Bangalore under instructions from Gokhale to speak about the Society and also to solicit donations for the Ranade Memorial in Poona. He was the guest of the then Dewan, V. P. Madhava Rao, who suggested that Sastri should make a public speech on Ranade to kindle interest in him and his Memorial. He felt somewhat diffident to speak on Ranade, the Guru of Gokhale, lest his speech might not come up to the expectations of Gokhale. He felt relieved and happy when he received the approbation of Gokhale.

Sastri visited Bangalore again in 1911 to give the inaugural address of a young men's association. He was also to give some other lectures and among them one on marriage reform, over which V. P. Madhava Rao, ex-Dewan, was to

preside. At the last moment, when the speaker, the chairman and the audience had gathered in the lecture hall, the meeting was banned by order of the then Dewan, T. Ananda Rao, without any reasons. Before dissolving the meeting, Madhava Rao regretted the action of Ananda Rao as there was nothing seditious or subversive about the speaker or the subject or the meeting. It was an unexpected shock, for which nobody was prepared. Hurried consultations took place whether to defy the ban or obey it. Sastri felt that the matter did not concern himself alone, but the Servants of India Society and, above all, Gokhale. He was not sure what action of his would be acceptable to Gokhale, and there was no time to consult him. He, therefore, decided to obey the outrageous order. He saw the Dewan, who assured him that he acted on his own responsibility and not at the instance of the British Resident or in accordance with the declared policy of the British bureaucracy in India, and professed great regard for the Servants of India Society, Gokhale and Sastri, but gave no reasons for the ban. The Residency gave the impression that it knew nothing of the affair. Whereupon, Sastri issued a statement to the press and reported to Gokhale and to V. Krishnaswami Aiyer, who was then member of the Madras Government and was in Ootacamund. Krishnaswami Aiyer mentioned the unfortunate incident to His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore, Sir Krishnaraja Wadiyar, who deplored it and requested Gokhale to pass it over. In defence of the ban it was said that it was the custom for British Indians to inform the Governments of Indian States when they proposed to enter them for public work, which Sastri had failed to do in the particular case. Neither Gokhale nor Sastri accepted the lame excuse. It was thought that, broadly speaking, the Governments of the Princely States were, and had to be, more loyal to the British bureaucracy in India than the bureaucrats themselves and had often to exhibit excessive zeal in anticipating even the unexpressed whims of the British Residents, and that Ananda Rao was prone to such deference. It was also thought that he was apprehensive of Indian politicians from British India entering Princely States and stirring up their placid waters and spreading sedition and subversion. He seemed to have particular antipathy to Sastri, for it was said that on one occasion he pointed a distant finger at the printed name of Sastri and

took care not to soil his tongue by pronouncing it!

Some years later, Bishop Whitehead of Madras and Mrs. Whitehead, who were great friends of Sastri, intervened to restore friendly relations between the Mysore Government and Sastri, and persuaded the former to invite the latter to inaugurate the Mysore Civic and Social Progress Association in Bangalore, under the chairmanship of His Highness the Yuvaraja of Mysore. He was the guest of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore in October, 1915. Since then both officials and non-officials in Mysore were extremely friendly to Sastri. On several subsequent occasions Sastri visited the State, sometimes as the guest of the Maharaja and the Government of Mysore, and gave some of his most important lectures in that State.

In connection with the Morley-Minto Reforms proposals Gokhale visited England almost every year, and he was keen that Sastri, his right-hand colleague, should accompany him. But Sastri held back because of his aged and highly orthodox mother who wished him to be by her side in her last moments and to perform her funeral ceremonies in the orthodox form acceptable to her. This was, however, not to be. He could not defer going to England in 1919 in connection with the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, and his mother passed away soon after he left India.

Sastri met Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi for the first time on January 9, 1915. The next day in a personal letter to his brother, V. S. Ramaswami Sastri, he gave his first impressions of them:

"I saw the Gandhis at Narottam's. . . . They gave us an hour of their time yesterday. Mr. Gandhi, in some ways, especially the modest downward face and the retiring speech, reminds me strongly of Mr. A. Krishnaswami Aiyer [a very great friend of Sastri]. . . . He has one front tooth missing on the left side. Mrs. Gandhi looks at least ten years older—owing, I hear, to the jail hardships. She doesn't know English! Mr. Gandhi, after a few family matters are settled, will tour India for the space of one year, observing and studying but not speaking or writing. If he drops his 'anarch' views and takes ours he joins the S.I.S. If not, he eschews politics and becomes an exclusively social worker."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 189.

In the event the Mahatma did neither join the Society nor eschew politics! Sastri's letter continued:

"Queer food he eats; only fruits and nuts. No salt, milk, ghee, etc., being animal products, avoided religiously. No fire should be necessary in the making of the food, fire being unnatural.... The odd thing is he was dressed quite like a *bania*: no one would mark the slightest difference. He had a big sandal mark on his forehead and a *kunkum* dot besides. He did not stop with Mrs. Bahadurji because his caste people didn't like his being a Parsi's guest. His caste has two factions, one of which will support him and the other not."<sup>9</sup>

The Mahatma evolved since then in his food and other habits and his caste scruples. He took goat's milk, cooked *chapatis* and adopted a Pariah boy! The Gandhis were house-guests of Sastri and his wife in Madras in 1916, and the Sastris had to take in the Pariah boy along with them!

Gokhale passed away in Poona on February 19, 1915, at the early age of forty-nine. He was First Member of the Servants of India Society, a life tenure. Sastri, who was away in South India, hurried to Poona. His colleagues chose him to succeed Gokhale. Feeling himself unworthy of assuming the designation of his Master, he declined to be the First Member and agreed to be President for a term of three years in the first instance.

Sastri took several occasions to deny the rumour that Gokhale had on his death-bed nominated him as his successor in the Society. Speaking on the Gokhale Day in 1923, Sastri said:

"Though reminded of the Society and entreated to state his wishes in regard to it, he said nothing. Perhaps he retained to the last a misgiving that he had always about me, that I had marked leaning to the other school of politics and was only an extremist in disguise. Perhaps, too, he remembered that Mr. Gandhi was back in India and that they had anxious talks about his joining the Society. But I feel sure, as sure as if he had told me, that his reticence on the subject was due to a deeper motive. He was aware how institutions, like property, often suffered from having to follow courses prescribed by dead men. He loved the Society like his own child and cherished it above all things. Its

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

future was for a long time his greatest concern in life. Any other person would have given minute instructions as to its conduct after him. But he had greater wisdom and greater faith than most men; and left it to the judgment of his pupils, unhampered by the wishes of a dying master. He had done all he could for it, and now he must part from it with complete resignation as he had parted a little while ago with his family. It was the moment of supreme *sanyasa*, such as crowns the lives of a few elect ones in this holy land, the final detachment from all that one held dear, the withdrawal of the soul of set purpose from its earthly attachments."<sup>10</sup>

If Gokhale thought of anybody at all as his successor, it was Mahatma Gandhi, who returned to India from South Africa in 1914. But the differences between the two were palpable. So Gokhale asked Gandhi to tour India for a year and acquaint himself with the then prevailing conditions and, if he felt that he would fit in, join the Society and become its President. By the time Gandhi completed the one year, Gokhale passed away. Subsequently, Gandhi sought admission to the Society as a member, but as the differences persisted, he withdrew his request for admission and saved the Society from having to refuse it. For himself the Mahatma said that the withdrawal of his application made him "truly a member of the Society". Sastri referred to the episode in one of his later speeches:

"True, that event [Gokhale's death] deprived us of the shelter afforded by a great name, and even the senior-most of the survivors was without an established position. But his guidance had been clear and his example full of illumination. Our first trial, however, was not long in coming. Mr. Gandhi, having completed the year of travel prescribed by Gokhale, knocked at our door for admission. Anxious were our consultations at the time. We saw deep differences between him and us and felt, though none could have given clear expression to it, that his political evolution would take him farther from us. Still our hearts trembled as well as grieved when we told him that it was best for both of us to remain apart and pursue our several courses. The event has vindicated our decision. We have indeed had many occasions to take the field against him. Looking back over the unhappy period, let us confess that, while we recall nothing but infinite

<sup>10</sup> *My Master Gokhale*, p. 269.

compassion and tenderness from him, we have, like naughty children, indulged occasionally in merriment and strong criticism. Still, so curious and contradictory is human relationship that, sharply contrasted as Mr. Gandhi and the Society are in outward action, they would be found near of kin where motives were weighed and the spirit was taken into account."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

## MADRAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

LORD PENTLAND had heard of Sastri from Sir William Wedderburn in England. When he became Governor of Madras in 1913, he took kindly to Sastri and consulted him frequently on a variety of matters and nominated him to the Madras Legislative Council, then constituted under the Indian Reforms Act of 1909, popularly known as the Morley-Minto Constitution. The Council consisted of a majority of non-officials, partly nominated and partly elected. The non-official elected members were in a minority. Non-official members were permitted to ask questions, move resolutions in the form of recommendations to Government and speak on the budget. It became the convention for official spokesmen of Government to oppose as a rule the resolutions moved by non-officials, particularly the elected ones, though they were only recommendations which were not binding on the Government even if passed in the Council. Officials displayed a polite but ill-concealed pity for the elected members, whom they credited with ignorance, inexperience and impracticable idealism, like children asking for the moon. It was remarkable that non-officials, knowing in advance that their resolutions would be defeated anyhow, persisted in taking their opportunities seriously, in the hope that their arguments would tell ultimately.

During his term in the Madras Legislative Council from 1913 to 1916, Sastri was very active, asking questions, moving resolutions and speaking on the budgets. Though a nominated member, he did not feel obliged to support the official view. He preferred to judge each question on its merits and act accordingly. It happened that on most occasions he supported the non-official view. He did not, how-



ever, hesitate to stand by the official view when he thought fit and was, in consequence, accused sometimes of partiality for official opinions. Speaking in the Council on April 8, 1916, he referred to his special position, prefacing it with light banter:

"I have been trying to figure myself as I appear to my official colleagues in this Council. I plead guilty, Sir, first of all, to being an educated Indian, although I would plead in mitigation of the sentence that I am a moderately educated Indian. For, I am not a lawyer, although I have a vague recollection of having received a certain amount of lecturing in the Law College, when a number of amiable professors were trying—I am afraid in vain—to indoctrinate me into the mystery of legal profession. I have been trying to modulate my voice and use it with my non-official colleagues. But I have not failed to realise that I am in some ways differently situated from the mass of them. They are the elected representatives of some constituency or other, but I enjoy a position of comparative freedom. I have let myself go on occasions and tried to take a more detached view than perhaps one would expect from one who ordinarily ranges himself on the side of non-officials, so detached that it has been my privilege to observe the growing cordiality and mutual respect and forbearance between officials and non-officials in this Council."<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion, he playfully congratulated the officials on achieving "practical and thorough mastery of the difficult art of suffering non-officials gladly," and twitted them on being susceptible of ignorance, inexperience and impracticable idealism, which they attributed to non-officials:

"During the last two or three days I was somewhat interested in watching that our influence has infected the officials. We have generally been accused of coming to this Council with an imperfect acquaintance with the facts we are propounding, of lack of experience and of a general fondness for visionary views and impracticable ideals. I, therefore, received a certain amount of satisfaction—I am afraid not far removed from malicious—when I heard the Education Secretary giving his emphatic adherence to an ideal which has been found to be impracticable

<sup>1</sup> Madras Legislative Council, April 8, 1916, p. 906.

and acknowledged to be impracticable, and going into ecstasies over an alternative to that ideal, which has likewise been proved to be worthless."<sup>2</sup>

- Sastri felt that the efforts of non-officials were not without results:

"A somewhat pessimistic view has been presented to this Council with which I must express some difference on my part. It is true that as regards recorded achievements, our results are poor. We have spoken, grumbled, complained; we have moved resolutions, lost them and bravely moved other resolutions. Nevertheless, has it been altogether wasted labour? I dare not say so. I am free to confess that a great deal of good has resulted even from our work. Suggestions, apparently rejected, have, however, gone home and borne fruit—not capturing the Council directly, but otherwise. Questions answered rather curtly in the Council have, however, been taken up and upon investigation have led to the remedies desired. On the whole, I am glad to acknowledge, Your Excellency, that in this Council the general atmosphere is one of cordial respect and goodwill."<sup>3</sup>

Sastri moved resolutions on a great variety of subjects, particularly education, his favourite. He pleaded, that, instead of giving better education to those few who received some already, some education should be given to those who at the moment received none; that elementary schools conducted by private agencies should be preferred to those run by District Boards or Government because they were less expensive and not less efficient; and that the Government's policy should not be efficiency *vs.* expansion but efficiency *cum* expansion; and that elementary school teachers should be paid enough by way of salaries to save them from the necessity of eking out some additional income by other work which adversely affected their work at school. Sastri took the Council into his confidence and revealed that he and his wife differed regarding the medium of instruction in the Government Girls' School, Triplicane, Madras. It was English. Sastri urged that it should be the mother-tongues of the pupils.

"My wife told me: 'I hear you are going to disturb the system of education in the Triplicane School. Why not our girls learn

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, April 1, 1915, p. 504.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, April 8, 1916, p. 906.

English as they are doing now, as that seems all right?' I explained the matter to her, and after hearing her with great patience, I did not think it was possible for me to defer to her judgment in the matter, chivalrous husband though I fancy myself to be."<sup>4</sup>

The Council supported Mrs. Sastri!

Of the value of the English language in India, Sastri had no doubts. "English must, of course, always occupy a most prominent place in the curricula of schools and colleges, for it would be an evil day indeed for India if her doors ceased to be flung wide open to the glories and shining influence of English literature, rich in noble ideas and glowing with inspiration to noble deeds."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he was betrayed in the heat of the discussion on another occasion to say: "One day people must realise that English cannot be spoken in this country."<sup>6</sup>

Sastri referred to the status of the English language in India again in the Indian Legislative Council on February 6, 1918, when the question of the reorganization of India on the linguistic basis came up for discussion. He feared that English would be replaced by local languages as media of legislation and administration. So highly did he value English as a unifying bond that he welcomed the suggestion that the grant of Swaraj to India should be coupled with the proviso that English should be the language of the legislatures and governments for the next twenty or thirty years. For, he said: "The idea of an Indian nationality, the idea of the whole of this country being able to draw patriotism on the largest scale, depends to a very considerable degree on the vote that we are prepared to give to the only vehicle of Western civilization in this country, namely the English language."<sup>7</sup>

Sastri right through championed the cause of low-paid employees of Government, like teachers, clerks and menial servants, and vehemently opposed increased salaries and allowances and special amenities to the high-paid civil servants. Sastri lamented that Englishmen no longer spelt "India" as "duty."

He strongly objected to the then prevailing system of

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, February 2, 1916, p. 432.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, February 2, 1916, p. 432.      <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, April 7, 1916, p. 850.

<sup>7</sup> Indian Legislative Council, February 6, 1918, p. 502.

fining low-paid teachers:

"A man may be inefficient; . . . but if he only gets an income of Rs. 70 per year, to try to improve him by cutting that income to the extent of 25 per cent is to apply a very wrong method of correction. . . . These poor school-masters are people whose income is so low that the reduction of one anna might mean the deprivation of one meal for themselves and their children. . . . I am pleading for the poor school-master, men who do nothing but good to their surroundings, men who maintain the noble tradition of teaching, men who are known in the villages as *vadhyars*, a term of respect, which is replaced by 'Sir'."<sup>8</sup>

Sastri's work in the Madras Legislative Council was characterised by his deep concern not only for the extension and improvement of education and the amelioration of the service conditions of the teachers as well as of other low-paid Government servants, but also for the spread of the cooperative movement, village panchayats and many other questions of public interest. He strove to increase the powers and influence of non-official Indian opinion at all levels of the administration, the government, the local boards and municipalities, and village panchayats.

Commenting on his work in the Madras Council, F. H. M. Corbett, sometime Advocate-General of Madras, said:

"In Mr. Sastri we have a legislator of whom anybody may well be proud. Nothing has given me greater pleasure in the Council than to see him arguing the cause he loved with eloquence, courage and persistency, and with a ready smile when defeated, which marks him out as a born legislator."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Madras Legislative Council, April 6, 1916, p. 792.

<sup>9</sup> *Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri*, Sketch (Natesan, Madras), p. 6.

## CONGRESS-LEAGUE SCHEME OF REFORM

Among the first public questions which faced Sastri as the successor of Gokhale in 1915 was healing the split between the Congressmen, as represented by Gokhale, and the Nationalists, as represented by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The Congress, at its session in Madras in 1914, appointed a committee to evolve a compromise, and in 1915 approved the Committee's formula, and in 1916 gave effect to it at the annual session in Lucknow. At the same time, a scheme of political reform for India was jointly sponsored by the Congress and the Muslim League for presentation to the Government of India and the British Government. Sastri laboured hard and unobtrusively in its preparation.

The Congress-League Scheme, as it came to be called, was foreshadowed in the Memorandum which Nineteen Elected Members of the Indian Legislative Council, including Sastri, submitted in September, 1916, to the Government of India and the British Government when it was known that these authorities were considering proposals for political reform in India. The keynote of the Memorandum was: "India does not claim any reward for her loyalty, but she has a right to expect that the want of confidence on the part of the Government, to which she ascribes her present state, should now be a thing of the past and that she should no longer occupy a position of subordination but one of comradeship."<sup>1</sup>

As an introduction to the Congress-League Scheme, Sastri published a pamphlet, *Self-Government for India under the British Flag*, in which he presented, with a vast wealth of authoritative quotations, India's case for self-

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches and Writings of V. S. Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 80.

government on a par with the Dominions.

At the outset he vigorously opposed the proposal of some members of the Round Table Group in England, led by Lionel Curtis, for the constitution of an Imperial Parliament or Federation, which would consist of Great Britain and the Dominions and which would govern the Dependencies in the Empire. Curtis commended the scheme to India on the express ground that it would give her a voice in the determination of the steps by which, and the pace at which, she could advance towards self-government in internal affairs. But Sastri rightly feared that such an Imperial Parliament would amount to India being ruled not only by Great Britain but by the Dominions also, unless India was made a Dominion in the meanwhile:

“Our present concern is to protest against any arrangements which will leave us in a worse condition politically than we are in now and consign us to the position of a household drudge in the Imperial family, compelled to put on the livery not only of Great Britain but also of New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and petty Newfoundland. We look to the statesmen of Great Britain to defend our interests and our honour. Our only shield is the attainment of self-government under the British Flag. Once mistress of her own destinies, India will know how to hold her own among the nations that owe allegiance to the British Crown. Her people cannot be reconciled to the continuance of the British connection unless their country, the greatest dependency of England, the brightest jewel in her diadem, be elevated to the status and privileges of a self-governing Dominion.”<sup>2</sup>

In the stand that he took, Sastri had the support of Dr. A. B. Keith who, in his classic, *Imperial Unity and Dominions*, observed: “The Dominions cannot expect to share in the position formerly enjoyed without question by the United Kingdom as the autocratic, if benevolent, controller of the destinies of the country. The self-consciousness of the people of India, as voiced by the inheritors of the English political aspirations, would decline to accept the theory that Indian policy could be controlled in any way by the representatives of the Dominions, and this refusal would be completely justified in view of the fact that the Dominions shut their doors on the admission to Indians,

<sup>2</sup> Sastri: *Self-Government for India under the British Flag*, p. 10.

and accordingly treat Indians as such as inferiors on the ground of race alone.”<sup>3</sup> Sastri was willing to support an Imperial Parliament or Federation on one indispensable condition, namely, that the standard of representation of India was on a par with that of the Dominions. But that was a difficult matter as long as India was a Dependency. Which was to come first: Imperial Federation or Indian self-government? Curtis preferred Federation first, while Sastri preferred Indian self-government first. It is interesting to note that Curtis, who at first argued that external equality of India would promote her internal self-government, subsequently held the view that internal self-government would enable India to be a full member of the Imperial Parliament. Sastri, who at first discounted the value of external equality before self-government, subsequently came to the conclusion that external equality might promote internal self-government! As it happened later, India was accorded external equality with Britain and the Dominions when she was admitted to the Imperial Conferences, the League of Nations and to the United Nations, long before she attained internal self-government.

Sastri rebutted the argument that Indians were yet unfit for the high responsibility of self-government and offered proof, on high authority, that whenever opportunity had been afforded, they had shown that they could work modern institutions in the modern spirit.

The Congress-League Scheme, Sastri pointed out, was different from “Responsible Government” as understood in Britain and the Dominions, because the executive was not “responsible” to the legislature and was under no obligation to resign on an adverse vote. It, however, provided for what might be called the substance of “responsible” government inasmuch as the executive was bound to carry out resolutions which the legislature might pass twice. There were other features also in the Scheme which rendered the executive effectively “responsive” to the legislature.

Sastri took pains to demonstrate that the Congress-League Scheme was not revolutionary but was only evolutionary. But the time was gone when Indians were content with the opportunities for the expression of their opinions in the then legislatures. Emphatically he declared: “We want political power; let there be no mistake about it. We

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

want the right to rule ourselves.”<sup>4</sup> He recalled that the world resounded to the peals of joy which greeted the establishment of democracy in Russia in the last few weeks and quoted with approval the “super message” of President Woodrow Wilson to the American Congress, in which he had said: “Civilization itself seems to be in balance; but right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for the universal dominion of right by such concert of free peoples as will bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself free at last.”<sup>5</sup> He denied the accusation that the benefits of British rule were not appreciated by Indians, and asserted that few understood them and realised their full value as the educated classes in India who had read accounts of the disorganised conditions of the country before the British came on the scene. He, however, agreed that India needed steady progress rather than rapid and catastrophic changes. But how are these to be defined and measured? Japan and the Philippines started later than India and were already ahead of her. If anything, her progress was too slow for patience.

Sastri took every opportunity to press the claims of India for political progress. In the Budget Debate on March 23, 1917, he welcomed the war-gift of £100 millions to Britain, notwithstanding the sacrifice it imposed on India. It was a “dear gift that we make,” he said, “to the British Empire out of our hearts,” which he hoped would eventually prove to be the means of consolidating the interests that bind England and India. The war-gift laid an obligation on England to set India free. India had no desire to embarrass the Government in time of war with any suggestions for political advance. But as the authorities were already considering the question, India wanted to offer counsel, which might be useful to Government. He contrasted the attitude of the British administrators of the day with that of earlier British statesmen: “It is somewhat strange that decades ago, when public life was low in this country and public demands had not risen to any high pitch, it was left to English administrators and statesmen to lay down in clear and generous terms the policy of

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.



continuous improvement which was to end in the final emancipation, in a political and economic sense,\* of the people of this country." He recalled the British Prime Minister's welcome to the revolution then in progress in Russia as an event marking a world-epoch and as the first great triumph of the principles for which Britain had entered the war, namely, the dethronement of autocracy and the establishment on a sure footing, it was hoped, of popular freedom. He asked for the identical thing for India. Should India be the last country in the world to obtain the great triumph of the principles for which England and India alike were making terrible sacrifices? Let it not be said that any school of English politicians stood deliberately in the way of according to India that popular freedom which they hailed in the case of Russia even when it was inaugurated in the catastrophic manner of which they had heard. He wanted peaceful, constitutional and ordered progress for India. At the same time, it should be declared clearly to Indians that they shall one day be free. He regretted that while there were many authorities, high and low, in the country ready to deprecate and discourage, there was none—sad thought—to speak a word of hope, to hold out to the coming generations the promise of freedom for which England had always stood and for which she and India were striving. He had no doubt that the Government was already contemplating the announcement, at a seasonable time no doubt, of the goal towards which India would politically evolve under the fostering care of the British Government. And he hoped that Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, would earn the "proud distinction of having been able to initiate a large and substantial, though certainly not a catastrophic, scheme of reform."

The announcement, which somewhat prophetically Sastri anticipated, was made a few months later. The Rt. Hon. E. S. Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, made the following Declaration in the House of Commons on August 20, 1917:

"The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in

India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps should be taken in this direction as soon as possible.

"I would add, however, that progress in this policy can only be achieved by successive stages. The British Government and the Government of India, on whom the responsibility lies for the welfare and advancement of the Indian peoples, must be the judges of the time and the measure of each advance, and they must be guided by the cooperation received from those on whom new opportunities of service will be conferred and by the extent to which it is found that confidence can be reposed in their sense of responsibility. Ample opportunity will be afforded for public discussion of the proposals which will be submitted to Parliament in due course."

It is noteworthy that the idea of "responsible" government for India emanated from Britain, from Montagu, and not from Indians, whose idea at the time was "responsive" government as envisaged in the Congress-League Scheme. Sastri, along with some friends in Madras, was among the first to hail the Montagu Declaration and advocate maximum support for it. The Indian National Congress, which met in Calcutta in the last week of December, 1917, under the presidentship of Dr. Annie Besant, welcomed the Montagu Declaration of Responsible Government as the goal of British policy in India and urged the British Government to enact immediately a time-limit for its fulfilment and, in the meanwhile, to give effect to the Congress-League Scheme. In November, 1917, after the publication of the Montagu Declaration and before the session of the Congress, Sastri published *The Congress-League Scheme: An Exposition*, in which he declared his preference for "responsive" government as better suited to India than "responsible" government. He was of the view that "responsible government" on the British model would work beneficially only if there were two and only two large and well-defined political parties. The system had not worked well outside of Britain. Even in Britain it had already seen its best days. The then newly constituted National Party in England had observed: "For years past the old party system has been nothing better than an organised mockery of the true spirit of the nation. If we are to win victory in the War—and after—we must free ourselves somehow from the

clutches of this octopus. The future of the Commonwealth depends on the honesty and capacity of our public men. Politics is a matter of life and death. Should it continue to be played as a game of party interests and personal ambitions, served by two machines which are kept in funds by the sale of honours, the end can only be disaster."<sup>6</sup> The political leaders of India, who fashioned the Congress-League Scheme, claimed Sastri, had adopted the expedient of "irresponsibility" of the executive to the legislature "with a sure instinct for what was safe and suitable" to the then conditions in India. It had a good parallel in the Swiss Constitution. Later on, Sastri changed his mind and accepted "responsible" government, mostly because he felt that it was familiar to the British and would encounter less resistance from them than a new type of constitution unfamiliar to the British.

Soon after the Congress-League Scheme was adopted, Sastri went round the country expounding it and defending it against criticisms. He insisted that the agitation should be constitutional and peaceful: "The truth will bear repetition that in British policy great changes may be brought about by the sole means of constitutional agitation. It is the boast of English historians that by timely concessions and adjustments their statesmen have as a rule averted violence and revolution." At the same time, he warned the British: "It cannot be sound policy where the normal practice is to meet a situation only when it has developed undesirable symptoms." He pleaded with Indians: "Let our workers, young and old, remember always that a good cause does not need a bad means. . . . If violence there must be, let it be what others inflict on us; if suffering there must be, let it be what we bear; if sacrifice there must be, let it be what we make, and not what we exact."<sup>7</sup> His advice to Indians was hardly different from Satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi. The two passages exemplify the dilemma of people like Sastri: their faith and hope in constitutional agitation and their fear that peaceful agitation might not be enough to produce timely results. There were occasions later when Sastri's faith in constitutional agitation was shaken, but it was never undermined.

Sastri's earnest plea for peaceful and constitutional agi-

<sup>6</sup> Sastri: *The Congress-League Scheme*, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Sastri: *Self-Government for India under the British Flag*, p. 28.

tation had reference to the political unrest in the country at the time. Most of it was constitutional but part of it was violent and conspiratorial. Government made free use of the Defence of India Act of 1915, a war measure, and the Indian Press Act of 1910, to control violence. Such action also led to the stifling of legitimate and peaceful agitation.

The Defence of India Act was due to expire a few months after the conclusion of the War. Government felt that it should have similar exceptional powers even after the War. Accordingly, on December 10, 1917, it appointed a committee, presided over by Mr. Justice S. Rowlatt from England, to report on the subject of revolutionary crime in India. The Committee's Report was published in India in July, 1918, and roused a storm of indignant protest because, among others, it recommended, as a permanent measure, the trial of political cases without juries and indefinite internment without trial. About the Report and its aftermath, two British historians, Edward Thompson and G. T. Garrett, said: "The events which occurred during these twenty months left an imprint on Indo-British relations comparable with the after-effects of the Mutiny (of 1857). The nationalist movement, aided by Mrs. Besant's skilful propaganda, had become troublesome to the Government, which depended on the Press Act and the Defence of India Act to curb the opposition. The need for some less cumbrous procedure tempted the Government to take a most ill-advised step. In 1917 a committee, under Mr. Justice Rowlatt, was appointed to enquire into the course of Criminal conspiracies. A peripatetic committee was not likely to elucidate much information not already possessed by the Criminal Investigation Department, and its appointment clearly foreshadowed some more effective measures of repression, which would probably not be confined to the anarchist organisations against which the Committee was ostensibly directed."<sup>8</sup> The Government's *bona fides* in appointing the Committee were suspect from the very beginning.

Montagu was in India when the Rowlatt Committee was announced. He arrived in India on November 10, 1917, and toured the country along with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, till May 11, 1918, interviewing officials and

<sup>8</sup> Edward Thompson and G. T. Garrett, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 604.

non-officials regarding the reforms. A Deputation of the Congress and the Muslim League waited on them on November 15, 1917, at Delhi. Sastri was a member of it.

Tilak and Mrs. Annie Besant, who were dissatisfied with the leisurely ways of the Congress, started each a Home Rule League for continuous and high-pressure political agitation. Partly because of the unhappy associations in the minds of British statesmen regarding Irish Home Rule, Sastri refrained from joining the Indian Home Rule Leagues, but carried on continuous propaganda for political reform on behalf of the Congress. So intense was Mrs. Besant's agitation that it greatly embarrassed the Government of Madras under Lord Pentland with the result that she and two of her colleagues were ordered to be interned in June, 1917.

The internment of Mrs. Besant and her colleagues created hot resentment in India and provoked a strong demand for passive resistance. On August 14, 1917, the special session of the Madras Provincial Congress Committee adopted a resolution in favour of passive resistance to unjust and unconstitutional orders inhibiting constitutional agitation. Sastri opposed it but his opposition was finally overruled by a majority, with some abstentions. In a letter to the Secretary of the Servants of India Society, he said: "I spoke for such passive resistance movement only (and no more) as might be involved in disregarding prohibitory orders of Government against meetings and processions. My arguments told. But when we met the next day for the adjourned sitting, the tide turned, and an amendment was moved, the effect of which was to approve of passive resistance almost without qualifications."

Sastri defined his position:

(1) Roughly, passive resistance was of two kinds: that which was almost forced upon the people by Government's prohibition of meetings and processions, being denial of elementary rights of free speech, and that which the people invented as a special form of protest against wrong or a means of obtaining political concessions. He was for the former, but not for the latter.

(2) Passive resistance was only justified when other means had been tried in vain. Mr. Gandhi tried meeting, protest, deputation, etc., before resorting to passive resistance in South

Africa. Indians had yet to try resolution in the Viceroy's Council and appeals to Parliament and English politicians.

(3) Passive resistance embarrassed Government in war time and alienated the Premier and other British friends whose sympathy was India's chief hope in the then political situation.

Soon after Montagu made his Declaration, Sastri cabled him to release Mrs. Besant. She was released on September 16, 1917. The proposal for passive resistance was also dropped.

## INDIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SASTRI took his seat in the Indian Legislative Council at its Simla session on September 5, 1916. He was among the two who were elected to it by the Madras Legislative Council, the other being B. N. Sharma, both Brahmins. C. Vijayaraghavachari, a Brahmin, and Dr. T. M. Nair, a non-Brahmin, were defeated in the contest. Curiously enough, Sastri was singled out for severe, sustained and most uncharitable criticism by the non-Brahmin leaders on the allegation that he had appealed to the communal sentiment of Brahmins! As a matter of fact, he obtained support from both Brahmins and non-Brahmins and did not appeal to, or win on, communal grounds. Three non-Brahmins gave each a double vote for him. In his Tamil articles in the *Swadeshamitran* in 1941, he emphatically denied that there was any truth in the allegation that he was responsible for provoking the non-Brahmin movement.

Among his non-official colleagues in the Indian Legislative Council were such stalwarts as M. A. Jinnah, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Babu Bhupendranath Basu and Sir B. N. Sharma. The Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, was President of the Council. Sastri was a very active member and participated in the deliberations on a great variety of subjects.

Gokhale was a member of the Royal Commission on Public Services in India, which was appointed in 1912 and whose Report was published in 1917, after his death. Sastri, who had been examined by the Commission, moved a series of resolutions in the Indian Legislative Council urging the rapid Indianisation of the Services. His main objective was to increase the proportion of Indians in the higher services

and to conduct competitive examinations either wholly in India or simultaneously in India and in England, and otherwise equalise the opportunities for Indian and British candidates.

On February 27, 1918, Sastri moved that engineers for the Public Works Department and the Railways should be recruited wholly in India, apart from the few posts reserved to the Royal Engineers. He denied that Indian engineers, because of their race, were inferior to British engineers. If some Indian firms employed British engineers, it was not because they were superior to Indians but because they carried greater prestige and influence with the Government—a consideration which need not weigh with the Government with respect to their own engineers. The Resolution was, of course, lost.

He followed up his defeat by proposing that no preference should be accorded to Anglo-Indians as against Indians in the Railway and Post and Telegraph Services and that equally high educational qualifications should be prescribed for all, irrespective of racial considerations. He vigorously repudiated the Government's thesis that, because Indians preponderated in some services, Anglo-Indians should preponderate in others and by reservation as against competition: "Now, injustice does not become justice; impropriety cannot become propriety; partiality become even-handed justice simply because it has antiquity behind it. And if I understand the spirit of British administration, it is the courage with which it puts down these vices which have the prestige of age behind them." This Resolution was also defeated. Undaunted, he moved his next resolution the next day, February 28, 1918. He asked that effect be given to the recommendation of the Public Services Commission that technical and scientific services be recruited entirely in India, that suitable institutions be created in India to train such personnel, that, in the meanwhile, qualified Indians be sent abroad for higher technical and scientific education and that recruitment of British personnel be discontinued within ten years. Government expressed sympathy, but pleaded difficulty in agreeing to the definite time-limit. Sastri withdrew the Resolution.

It is interesting to note that Government, which objected to the time-limit of ten years as too definite, objected also

<sup>1</sup> Indian Legislative Council, February 27, 1918, p. 623.



to the stipulation of "within a reasonable period" in a previous resolution of Sastri's on the ground that it was too indefinite!

Among other resolutions arising from the Report of the Public Services Commission which Sastri moved was one recommending the constitution of a separate and independent Civil Medical Service, as distinguished from the Indian Medical Service which was primarily a military service. He pointed out that the free admission of Indians to the Indian Medical Service, a military service, was free only in name because of the conditions attached to it and pleaded that Indians should be given equality of opportunity with Britishers. Indignantly he asserted: "We are emphatically of opinion, and we dare to assert it as often as may be necessary, that, in our opinion, the Indianisation of the Service would conduce to greater efficiency." He pointed out that Indianisation would retain in India the very valuable experience gained at the country's expense during service and be available after retirement. "It will, at all events, place within the reach of a body of people who will be patriotic, who after their pension will remain in India and give the benefit of their matured wisdom to the service of the land." Finally, he appealed to Government to take a broader view, to look at the matter not always from the convenient service point of view, but also, even if inconvenient, from the necessary, the just and the supreme point of view of the necessities of the people and the interests of the future of this country. The Resolution was, as usual, defeated.

Sastri moved a resolution on March 13, 1918, recommending speedier Indianisation of the Police Service in India and, to that end, equalisation of opportunities for Indian and British entrants to the Service by having simultaneous competitive examinations in England and in India. Government, in opposing it, contended that competitive examinations did not disclose character, initiative, sense of responsibility and other desirable qualities which were necessary to sustain the British character and the British tone of the Police Service. Sastri retorted that Britain had not yet abandoned the competitive recruitment of its Police personnel, whatever be the defects of the system. And he wondered if every Britisher had *ipso facto* the necessary British character and tone: "I wish expressly to ask whether

it is the belief of the exponents of this doctrine here that every single Englishman in the British Isles is a vehicle of this higher British spirit and this higher British character. Are they all swans that live in the islands of Great Britain and Ireland? Do competitive examinations bring all the top men out, the best out, the most honourable men out? Sir, if it is necessary to maintain the British character of the services, I venture to tell my Hon'ble friends on the opposite benches that they should take every care to bring into competition with the best Indian talent the best European talent." It was undesirable that Government should ask for best Indians and accept inferior Britishers. He went further to assert, that, if the Police was efficient, it was in a very considerable measure due to its Indian personnel.

Finally, he explained that the reason why non-officials had moved so many resolutions regarding the Services was that their Indianisation was closely connected with the political reforms that were soon to be introduced. The two were interrelated. Said he: "The reforms that may be brought into existence will require that the Services in India should be more considerably Indianised than they are today and there should be greater economy in the administration, if possible. I consider, therefore, that in order that the reforms may have the fullest effect, it is necessary also to Indianise the Services as rapidly as may be compatible with the safety and efficiency of the Services."<sup>2</sup> He thought that the question of the Services was second only in importance to the question of constitutional reform. He assured the Council, and particularly the British members of it, that non-officials had not brought the resolutions to accentuate racial bitterness but solely with a view to safeguarding the interests of the Indian tax-payers and the efficiency of the Services and the success of the reforms: "Much has been said on both sides which may have caused misconstruction and a certain amount of annoyance. That has been to a large extent inseparable from the character of the subjects with which we have been dealing. But let me assure the Council that for my part there has been no ill-will, that nothing has been said which has hurt my feelings or induced me to believe that we have unnecessarily been considering thorny matters and accentuated racial feeling."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, March 18, 1918, p. 1080.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, March 18, 1918, p. 1076.

Sastri followed in the footsteps of Gokhale in advocating in the Indian Legislative Council the cause of rapid universalisation of compulsory primary education. He appealed to the Government of India repeatedly to take full responsibility for universal, free and compulsory education in India and not leave it to the Provincial Governments and Local Bodies who tossed the ball back to the Government of India. He would not accept the argument that a foreign government, like the then Government of India, should not enforce compulsion on Indians. "Being in our place, that is, the place which belongs to us by nature, you should likewise incur our responsibilities," he urged.<sup>1</sup> The Resolution was, as usual, lost. Undeterred by the defeat, he returned to the good cause. As he himself put it, having been thrust out by the door, he ventured to come in again by the window. He moved that the budget provision for the extension of elementary education be increased by Rs. 30 lakhs. The Government barred the window also. With pathetic earnestness, he pleaded:

"You are our Providence. What is the destiny that you intend for the people of this country? Are they always to be of low vitality, without even the rudiments of education, or are they to be worked up to a state of educational efficiency such as we find in the Continent of Europe, among all nations there?"<sup>2</sup>

The Resolution was as usual lost.

Sastri regretted the introduction of communal representation in education. Speaking on the Dacca University Bill, he said: "We ought to recognise, whenever we admit this principle, that it is a lamentable necessity that compels us to do so and we ought to look forward to the time when we should discard it in the interests of the general community. If possible, we should, in admitting it, make such provision for such discarding in course of time." He was sorry, more sorry than he could tell that in the constitution of the Legislative Councils this principle was admitted without qualification. It had had the evil effects which might have been anticipated. It had let the favoured community from time to time to demand its extension in aggravated forms into departments where it is not only illegitimate but bound to be pernicious in its results. They have had de-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, February 28, 1917, p. 453.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, March 10, 1917, p. 576.

mands that it should be introduced into the constitution of local boards and municipalities and even in education. He knew of no department of human activity which should be kept sacred from the infection of this principle as education. Reluctantly he acquiesced in the introduction of the communal principle in the constitution of the Dacca University, but pleaded that the electorate should be common and not separate. He continued: "I cannot but recall with sadness to this Council a Resolution passed by the Non-Brahmin Federation in Madras some years ago in solemn meeting assembled to the effect that the principle of communal separation should be carried to this extent that educational establishments, all colleges and schools of every grade, from the collegiate to the elementary, should be communal: separate schools for Brahmins, separate schools for non-Brahmins, each community to be taught by teachers of their community. This is the kind of thing to which this leads, and want of timely precaution is likely to land us in similar difficulties." Fervently he appealed to the Government to resist the evil: "I would, therefore, solemnly entreat the members of the Government of India and their official advisers, you, who know the difference between the national and the sectarian spirit, you, who know how to work a constitution and will realise how the sectarian spirit, if allowed to roam unchecked, will choke off and kill the national spirit, you ought to help us in putting these safeguards on the admittedly evil principle which is to be introduced into the education of this country."<sup>6</sup> He regretted that even those Muslims and Christians who preferred to belong to the general electorate were not permitted to do so but were compelled to vote on communal lines, willy-nilly, and that no occasion was left for the several communities to come together and vote jointly.

As occasions arose, he reiterated his reluctant acquiescence in, as well as sincere opposition to, communal representation: "Communal representation is a necessity; but it is also an evil. Every time we admit it into our policy, we must seek to qualify and correct it. And lest custom make us callous, we must keep alive to the public the recognition of its evil. We submit to it under pressure of circumstances. Let us at least groan aloud."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, February 11, 1920, p. 686.

<sup>7</sup> *Servant of India.*, March 25, 1920, p. 87.

In February, 1917, when the First World War was still on, the Government of India sponsored a bill to constitute the Indian Defence Force. Sastri welcomed the move as one calculated to remove one of the standing disabilities of Indians and added that it would give Indians greater satisfaction if the Force was commanded by Indians and if its members were engaged on terms of perfect equality with the British Force. At the same time he appealed to Indians to make a success of the new experiment: "It is our bounden duty to remember that our progress in military matters is only too apt to be a little slower than our progress in other matters and I would, therefore, exhort my Hon'ble colleagues in this Council, as well as my friends outside, to do all in their power to make this first experiment a success."<sup>8</sup> When the Bill, as it emerged from the Select Committee, was under discussion, Sastri moved an amendment to eliminate the proposed racial discrimination between Anglo-Indians of "mixed racial origin" and Indians of "pure race." Dissatisfied with Government's reply, Sastri rejoined rather warily:

"I must confess that it appeared to me that His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief protested somewhat too much. He seems to take us for children. I invited him to lay bare the policy of the Military Department. He pointed to the words of the Select Committee's Report. I read them once, twice, thrice. They have failed to satisfy me. I come up to the Commander-in-Chief and ask him to throw some light on the matter, and he says, read the thing again! ... Is it really the case, Sir,—I do not know, if I am mistaken, I am mistaken with two hundred millions of unfortunate people of this country—is it really the case that there is nothing like mistrust of the Indian races? ... My advice is: 'Do not seek to discriminate.' It may be that you are not discriminating newly today. Do not seek to put on the statute book a discrimination which has existed and against which the people of this country have, time after time, protested. ... I beg the Commander-in-Chief, I beg you, Sir, I beg the Government of India, not to allow this measure to pass, bearing on the face of it this inscription: To be perfectly trusted by us, an Indian must be somewhat mixed in race, or he must change his religion."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Indian Legislative Council, February 21, 1917, p. 339.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, February 28, 1917, p. 415.

The Council was in great tension and the members were breathlessly attentive. The amendment was, of course, lost. During the final passing of the Bill, Sastri said:

"Sir, as one of those who moved amendments this morning and offered advice, which was perhaps rather more frank than welcome, I desire to . . . give the assurance that we will no longer obstruct the passage of this Bill into Act. We never had the intention of doing so. Unfortunately, we now and then have to appear in the character of critics, and I hope that on an occasion like this, which is as anxious as it is of great moment, our attitude will not be mistaken. Certain words which fell from His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief deserve to be emphasised. He was speaking of high Imperial policy. He was quite right. Policy cannot be changed, we recognise only too clearly, even by the Government of India in a day. They have got to take others into consultation, and if, therefore, sometimes we say things which are perfectly well known to you here and seem to you to be repetition of twice-told tales, we are talking to others who are listening but not with their ears to what is said in this Council. His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief has told us that every word uttered here will be remembered in time when it will be possible to give due consideration. We take that assurance and acquiesce in the passing of this Act."<sup>10</sup>

In 1920, after the conclusion of the War, the Government of India introduced two bills for the constitution of the Auxiliary Force, open only to Anglo-Indians of "mixed race," and the Indian Territorial Force, open to Indians of "pure race" but limited to infantry. Sastri recalled that when, in 1917, the Indian Defence Force was constituted, non-official Indians had the painful duty of drawing attention to certain racial discriminations in it and that the Commander-in-Chief had then given the assurance that the criticism would be considered when, after the conclusion of the War, permanent measures were proposed. Nevertheless, racial discrimination of the most objectionable kind was perpetuated after the War, and he asked for its justification. Surprisingly enough, Government professed to be innocent of racial discrimination in differentiating between the Auxiliary and Territorial Forces and brazenly accused Sastri of having imported rancour and bitterness

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, February 28, 1917, p. 429.

into the debate! During the third reading of the Bills, Sastri wished that the scope of the Forces should be rapidly expanded and that the "extraordinary inertia on the part of the Military Department" should be overcome. The Commander-in-Chief, who was not accustomed to such criticism, took it ill and angrily retorted: "What does Mr. Sastri know about it? He knows so little and is so entirely ignorant of any military matters that, as far as I am concerned, I pass it by. He is entitled to his opinion; I am equally entitled to disregard it. But as far as the Army is concerned, I desire to say, as its representative, that the work it has achieved during the last four years furnishes the best possible refutation of his charge. And if Mr. Sastri rises to higher positions, as I presume he will, and if his eloquence carried him into wider fields of activity, then I say, I do hope that he will in his work display no such inertia as he alleges has been displayed by the Army during the period I have had the honour of commanding it."<sup>11</sup> Sastri dismissed the Commander-in-Chief's outburst with ironical humour: "My pleasure is by no means qualified by His Excellency's somewhat spirited reply to my charge of inertia. I know His Excellency is never angry even when he appears to be so. I have known him more than once in this Council speak as though he were angry and adding: who says I am angry? That is His Excellency's way and we all understand it. I accept his criticism of my speech in good part and shall profit by it." And he ended with the fling: "But at the same time, I wish to add for the information of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief that, if he has never heard before of the inertia of the Military Department, he has not heard of something which everybody else has heard and known."<sup>12</sup>

In supporting the passage of the Territorial Force Bill, Sastri pleaded that its result should not be judged too quickly because of the Non-Cooperation Movement of Mahatma Gandhi. He said: "In particular, I am afraid that our young men are embarking on a perilous sea of what is called 'non-cooperation.' My Lord, we see nothing but dangers all round. The sky from horizon to horizon is covered with dark clouds. As the poet says, 'the prospect is one vast inky blot.' I wish it were possible to wean our youths from these dangerous enterprises. I wish some one with the pro-

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, August 27, 1920, p. 1276.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, August 27, 1920, p. 1277.

phet's fire and eloquence would dissuade them from having anything further to do with this non-cooperation."<sup>13</sup>

With reference to the Auxiliary Force Bill, Sastri withdrew his amendment opposing racial discrimination in it on the ground that, though it was an evil to be avoided if possible, it was not the appropriate time to press it with any prospect of success.

The question of the reorganisation of the Provinces in British India on the linguistic basis came up in the Indian Legislative Council on February 6, 1918. While conceding the special case of Andhra, Sastri opposed the general reorganisation on a linguistic basis. It was possible to secure compactness but not linguistic homogeneity. He regretted that the notion of India being a single nation, one political unit, was lost on the Andhra leaders. Sastri was unwilling to encourage the fissiparous tendency any further. He said: "Now, if we developed our provinces in such small areas and cut them off by means of their vernaculars from the larger life of the country—for, after all, difference in language does constitute a barrier to the free flow of public life—if we were to do that, should we not be rendering the different provinces somewhat strangers to each other? I am afraid that there is a good deal of danger in that." He feared a large number of small units would stimulate fissiparous tendencies: "I think the resources of the Central Government will be taxed to the utmost in managing a large body of small states, each perhaps developing to an inconvenient degree an independent will of its own and a parochial patriotism and a shallow view of life of its own."<sup>14</sup> He welcomed the suggestion that the proposal should be postponed till India attained self-government and till the people were consulted. He anticipated that the verdict would be against linguistic states because of the increased expenditure on their set-up at the expense of education and other more vital needs. He feared that all the new states would not be self-supporting, and few states would be willing to tax themselves to make up the deficit of other states.

Sastri feared that as a corollary of linguistic states, the local Indian languages would displace English as the media of legislation and administration in them. He was opposed to it. So highly did he value English as the unifying bond in India that, as stated already, he welcomed the sugges-

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, August 27, 1920, p. 1278.      <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, February 6, 1918, p. 502.



tion that the grant of Swaraj to India should be coupled with the proviso that English should be the language of administration and legislation for the next twenty or thirty years.

Speaking on the Budget for 1918-19—it was war time—Sastri said that it was as satisfactory as it could be at the time, but took leave to “grumble a little in the exercise of the constitutional right of the citizen in the British Empire” and referred to the distress caused to the poor by the rise in prices, which was partly due to inflation. He asked Government to remember that: “The poor man in this country, poorer than in most other countries, had likewise always to bear the whole weight of the administration on his back. Other people cry aloud for relief in this matter; relief is afforded to them, but always and inevitably at his expense.” He quoted Shakespeare in appealing to Government to cast an eye of pity on the poor man’s burdens:

Which have of late so huddled on his back,  
 Enow to press a royal merchant down,  
 And pluck commiseration of his state  
 From brassy bosoms and tough hearts of flint.<sup>15</sup>

He was critical of increase in indirect taxation but made an exception in the case of salt because it was a Government monopoly and Government could ensure that customers did not have to pay more for it than was warranted by the increase in the tax.

On the debate on the income-tax on March 14, 1918, Sastri humorously assessed his own status: “I do not represent lauded interest, but what other interest I represent it is difficult for me to say. I own no land and pay no land-tax. I make no income which comes within the Hon’ble the Finance Member’s sweep. I pay no income-tax. I contribute, so far as I can see, nothing to the State, except a certain amount of agitation which, I am firmly persuaded, is entirely wholesome.”<sup>16</sup> Sastri supported the levy of agricultural income-tax in addition to land-tax on the ground that those who could afford to pay more should pay, and added that the extra taxation would be willingly paid if its proceeds be earmarked for the promotion of education and health services.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, March 8, 1918, p. 824.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, March 14, 1918, p. 977.

## *REPRESSIVE LAWS*

THE Montford Report for reform and the Rowlatt Report for repression were by an unfortunate coincidence published about the same time. It would appear that both the Reports were signed in April, 1918, but published a few months later after Montagu left India. Both Montagu and Chelmsford knew the contents of the Rowlatt Report when they finalised their Report. While the reform proposals were vague, the proposals for repression were precise.

In 1917, while the First World War was still on, Montagu, who was dissatisfied with the administration in India, made the famous announcement on the 20th of August for the gradual introduction of responsible government in India. A few months later, on December 10, the Government of India announced the appointment of the Sedition Committee, presided over by Justice Sir Sydney Rowlatt, a judge of the High Court in England, to enquire into the sedition movement in India and make recommendations to deal with it. The Committee reported that the ordinary law was inadequate to deal with the problem and proposed to add to the permanent law of the land some of the drastic powers of the Defence of India Act, a war-time measure.

To forestall the consideration of the Rowlatt Report in the Indian Legislative Council, a non-official resolution was moved on September 19, 1918, recommending the appointment of a committee to enquire into the need for and the operation of restrictive laws such as the Indian Press Act of 1910 and the Defence of India Act of 1915. In supporting it, Sastri, with his usual fairness, acknowledged the Government's difficulties in preserving law and order in war time, particularly since some writings in the press had

tended to threaten the peaceful progress of India which at the time included Burma as well. He also acknowledged that, on the whole, Government had applied the restrictive laws with due caution and impartiality. But there were occasional acts which could hardly be justified. The Government of Burma had banned such papers as the *Indian Review* and *The Hindu* of Madras, which were of the highest standing and of which Madras was legitimately proud. It may be added, in parenthesis, that at the time *The Hindu* was bitterly attacking Sastri.

The right way to improve the tone of the press was more freedom, not less, said Sastri. Even the British bureaucracy might profit by press criticism. A press law, which was supported by the example of Japan, could not be a permanent measure on the statute book of India.

A few days later, on September 23, 1918, there was another non-official resolution, which recommended that the Rowlatt Report be shelved and that a committee be appointed to enquire into the working of the Criminal Investigation Department, including the Central Intelligence Bureau. Sastri did not approve of shelving the Rowlatt Report; he would face it squarely when the Government brought in definite proposals based on it. But as regards the positive part of the Resolution, he acknowledged that the two bodies did useful and necessary service, but sometimes overdid it by shadowing innocent people and humiliating them unnecessarily. In proof thereof he related one of his own experiences:

“Your Excellency, I am one of those who have been subjected for a considerable time to the persecution of this branch of the Service, and if I speak today, it is to unfold a plain unvarnished tale of the sufferings that I have borne at the hands of the Service. Their activities are manifold. Your Excellency will find it difficult to believe that two men were always following me for a certain period, for two or three years. They sat outside my house when I was in; and the moment I got out, they got out also. . . . Once in the town of Coimbatore, when I had an important engagement to fulfil and was in the act of engaging a conveyance, these persecutors of mine, unwilling perhaps to forgo their afternoon siesta, told every one of them not to drive me. The result was that my engagement had to remain unfulfilled.”

Then he added:

"My Lord, there are other ways in which one has been made to feel that one is suspect in one's own country for doing nothing worse than loving it. . . . My Lord, what was my offence that I had to undergo these strange experiences? I had given up my professional job and joined the Society founded by Mr. Gokhale, whose bust, subscribed for by many of our official friends, Your Excellency unveiled the other day. He himself was not free from the attentions of this body of people, but I leave that alone. Your Excellency, I remember reading in the life of Mazzini that the Austrian Criminal Investigation Department followed him in his younger days in the same way, and the reason they gave was: 'We know nothing against this young man, but he goes about mornings and evenings in a contemplating sort of mood. Our Government does not want young people to develop a contemplative mood.' I am afraid some members of the Criminal Investigation Department have taken into their heads that they do not want any man to give up his professional job and take to doing public duties in a missionary spirit."

He thought that such surveillance drove people to sedition.

The War ended on November 11, 1918. There was much relief and rejoicing in India because of the victory of the Allies. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Bill was incubating. President Woodrow Wilson of America had proclaimed the principle of self-determination. The Indian National Congress, which met in Delhi in the last week of December, 1918, asked that India should be given equality of status with the self-governing British Dominions and full responsible government at an early date. Among others, it demanded the repeal of all repressive legislation and pressed the view that legislation on the lines of the Rowlatt Report would prejudice the success of the reforms then on the anvil. The section of Congressmen, who shared Sastri's view that the reforms should be accepted as an advance and be saved and worked, had, as already mentioned, broken away from the parent body and formed the National Liberal Federation for the purpose.

Nevertheless, the Government of India decided to implement the recommendations of the Rowlatt Report and introduced two bills, the Indian Criminal Law Amendment

Bill and the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill, in February, 1919. Government spokesmen frankly admitted that the new legislation was "repressive," that they did not like repression, but they could not help proceeding with the Bills in order to cope with revolutionary crime as a precondition for the success of the Montagu reforms. Like Lord Morley a decade ago, Montagu felt obliged to humour the Tories in Britain and the British bureaucrats in India to soften their opposition to his reforms. The Bills were bitterly and unanimously opposed by all the non-official members, elected and nominated—a remarkable phenomenon.

On February 7, 1919, Sastri made one of his most powerful and eloquent speeches against the legislation. In the course of it he said:

"I am unable to find that either the nature of or the time for the legislation is suitable. As to the nature of the legislation, laymen like me will not be on sure ground in stating the reasons in a technical way. But as to the time for the legislation, I am perfectly clear that the Government have chosen a very unfortunate time. In the first place, Your Excellency, I think it is not in accordance with the practice of other Governments to bring in repressive legislation of this nature long before its necessity has become clear. . . . Now everything seems to be bright. Wrongdoing is under full control and Government can say that in the exercise of the powers they have, they have secured peace and tranquillity. To say now, long before the necessity may arise, that we want to equip ourselves permanently with weapons of repression—that word has been used by Government members themselves and I have no scruple, therefore, to use it—it is in my opinion simply to set the country in an uneasy state of excitement."

Rejecting the argument that the Executive would use the repressive powers justly and properly, he said:

"If in every case where the Executive were armed with arbitrary powers, they used them justly, properly and no more than was adequate to the occasion . . . then indeed there is apparently no reason why in the permanent law of England, in the permanent law of France and in the permanent law of America there should not be legislation similar to that which is proposed in this country. After all, it is good to have these powers. No

Government will ever abuse its power. . . . If that be so, if there be no fallibility in the Executive . . . then there is no limit to the placing of arbitrary power in the hands of any Executive which a Legislative Council may be called upon to sanction. That, however, is not the way that responsible people look at things. They ask: Are these powers necessary? I was wondering how the Hon'ble Sir George Lowndes (Law Member), himself having made these rather sweeping statements, came later to say: 'I myself as a Britisher hate this kind of thing; repression is hateful to me.' I heard the Hon'ble Sir William Vincent (Home Member) also say: 'After all, these things are bad.' Why should they be bad? We are bidden always to trust the Executive, to believe that they will never do wrong; the law will be used always considerately and only in the interests of the poor and the helpless; why should it be wrong then; why, then, should we scruple at all to leave all power in the hands of the Executive, to roll up the Courts of Law, to suspend or lay low your legislative councils altogether?"

And he answered:

"We think that the Executive are apt to make mistakes, and I think that they do make mistakes. We know. My Lord, Viceroys who have held, who are holding, who will hold power are under the delusion that Local Governments can make no mistakes whatever; that the heads of Local Governments may not yield to the public opinion of their [British] community, may not be hounded on by an infuriated press to take in hand a policy of severity, always, no doubt, with the best of intentions, always, no doubt, with a feeling of horror and repugnance, always, no doubt, with a desire to stop everything the moment it should become unnecessary. But, we know, Sir, from bitter experience, that these measures are put into force sooner than they become necessary; that while they are in force they are exercised more harshly than is necessary, and that they are dropped only with the utmost reluctance long after the exigencies that called them into existence have disappeared, long after enormous miseries and frightful hardships have been inflicted. We know these things have happened, and it is because, I take it, every Englishman feels that these things may happen that he is obliged to say, when he stands in defence of a legislation of this kind, however strongly he may word it in one part of his speech: 'I certainly dislike these things; they are objection-

able on principle.' If they are objectionable on principle in one place, they are objectionable on principle in every place, and their application must be tested by the severest tests, and they must at every step."

He was not convinced with the official plea that such laws would affect only the wicked and not the innocent:

"Now, My Lord, a bad law, once passed, is not always used against the bad. In times of panic, to which all alien Governments are unfortunately far too liable, in times of panic, caused, it may be, by very slight accidents, I have known Governments lose their heads; I have known a reign of terror being brought about; I have known the best, the noblest Indians, the highest characters amongst us, brought under suspicion, standing in hourly dread of the visitations of the Criminal Investigation Department."

He recalled his own painful experience and of several others:

"A gentleman, high in office at that time and about to retire from service, met me in the middle of the night on one occasion. I was quite surprised, and he told me: 'My dear fellow, I have been longing to see you these three or four days that you have been here, but this place swarms with spies and police informers. I am nearing my pension and have many children. I do not wish to be mixed up with a member of the Servants of India Society to their knowledge.' It is all very well to say that the innocents are safe. I tell you, My Lord, when Government undertakes repressive policy, the innocents are not safe."

Who are the innocents?

"Men like me would not be considered innocent. The innocent man is he who forswears politics, who takes no part in the public movements of the times, who retires into his house, mumbles his prayers, pays his taxes and *salaams* to all the Government officials all round. The man who interferes in politics, the man who goes about collecting money for any public purpose, the man who addresses a public meeting, becomes a suspect. I am always on the borderland and therefore, for personal reasons, if for nothing else, undertake to say that the possession in the hands of the Executive of powers of this drastic nature will not hurt only the wicked. It will hurt the good as well as the bad,

and there will be such a lowering of the political tone in the country that all your talk of responsible government will be mere mockery."

Sastri insisted that even the wrong-doer should be punished in a way approved by civilised society and not arbitrarily:

"When Skeffington was shot, I remember that the whole world was shocked. Roger Casement had an open trial. . . . Now, even in war, when all humanity throbs with excitement and peril and when nobody thinks anything except how to conquer the enemy, even then, My Lord, there are laws of war, and you have to play the game."

Indignantly, he repudiated the insinuation that the disapproval of revolutionary crime by non-official members of the Council was only "conventional" and not sincere, and hit back with vehemence:

"I was astonished to hear Sir Verney Lovat tell us that it is not enough to indulge in conventional regrets in this Council. I wonder very much whether he will agree to retain and repeat the word 'conventional.' When Hon'ble Members here get up and reprobate wicked deeds, I take leave to say that they do not do it in a merely conventional manner. I take it that we all abhor wickedness as much as Sir Verney Lovat or any member of the Rowlatt Committee does. May I turn back and say that the proposals made by the Government betray a somewhat callous disregard of liberty?"

Chivalrously, he offered to take back the word "callous" the moment any member said it was too harsh, and hoped that Sir Verney would reciprocate by taking back his "conventional," but in vain.

Sastri feared that, far from purifying politics as the Government thought, the repressive legislation might come near suppressing them. The crimes aimed at by the Bill were partly political, and the remedy for them was political amelioration and not repression.

He denied that passing the Bill and facing unpopularity was a test of fitness for responsible government.

"It may be that I and several others like me may be unable to face the storm of unpopularity, but I should like to say—



and I am not ashamed of it—that we certainly do not think that the sign of strength, that the sure proof that you are a born administrator, consists in courting unpopularity and defying public opinion. I am not made that way. I do not think that I lost by that. But at the same time when the stern call of duty comes, when the requirement of truth is laid on me, when the best interests of my country, as I understand them, require it, I am perfectly prepared to submit to unpopularity. If necessary, I am prepared to go through the fire of public odium.”

He recalled that non-officials had already stood several tests, as when they passed the Press Act and the Defence of India Act and when they gave a gift of a hundred million pounds to Britain for the War and so on:

“What test has been really applied to us to which we have not cheerfully submitted? I can hardly think of one. Bidden to bring the milk of a beast of prey, we have brought a jugful of milk of the tigress. Are you going to throw it aside, and say, ‘Bring the milk of the male tiger’? That is not fair.”

Sastri rejoined that it was not non-official Indians but the members of the Indian Civil Service who were really on their test:

“They profess to be prepared in India for a very early beginning of responsible government, when they would be willing, not to impose, as they do now, their will on the legislature, but to take the will of the legislature and carry it out, when they will be instruments of the legislature and not its master. Are they preparing for the time by carrying in the teeth of opposition, unanimous and unsparing, of their Indian colleagues, this measure through?”

He pointed to the fact that Government had no backing in the country:

“Whom have you behind you amongst Indians? The tragic story of India may be summed up in these words, that you have governed all these centuries in India in isolation and without having any responsible section of public opinion behind you. Now, at this supreme hour, have you behind you any section of public opinion to support you? The nominated members have not given their blessings to this bill; the Zamindar members have not given their support; the lawyer members will have

none of it; the members of commerce will have none of it; and yet, the Hon'ble Sir George Lowndes told us, 'We must carry this legislation through because we are satisfied that it is very right. We should be glad of your support, but as you do not support us, we have to carry it through in spite of you.' I admire the courage of the Hon'ble the Law Member. I admire the candour with which he has said that the Government had responsibility today and the non-official members had none of that responsibility. I realise that we have none, and I refuse to believe that, when the case is placed before the public in England, they would say we had responsibility and that we shirked it. We have

Sastri denied that non-official opponents of the Bill held out threats:

"None of us, certainly none of the Moderates, I take leave to say, has power to go and stir up a violent agitation in the country. It is impossible. The agitation must be there already. The heart must be throbbing if any words that we use here can possibly have any effect on the general political atmosphere. The agitation is there. I wish to assure my official colleagues that none of us has had a share yet in this business, but if our appeals fall flat, if the Bill goes through, I do not believe there is any one here who would be doing his duty if he did not join the agitation. That is not a threat. Anyhow, I am the best judge of my own mind, and I do not indulge in any threat. I have yet borne no part in this agitation, but if everything goes wrong, if we are face to face with this legislation, how it is possible for me, with the views that I hold, to abstain from agitation, I for one cannot say."<sup>1</sup>

Sastri's speech made a profound impression at the time. At its conclusion, there was an outburst of applause, in which the British members and even some officials joined.

Thanks to the official majority, the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill was referred to a Select Committee, of which Sastri was also a member. Three members declined to sign the Report of the Committee; three others, which included Sastri, signed it, subject to a Minute of Dissent. The Minute frankly acknowledged that the Select Committee had made the Bill less objectionable and suggested some more improvements but asserted that the

<sup>1</sup> Indian Legislative Council, February 7, 1919, pp. 540-43.

principle and policy of the Bill were objectionable and unacceptable and should be dropped altogether.

Sastri and his two colleagues who signed the Minute of Dissent were attacked by the Nationalists for having signed the Report at all and for not abstaining altogether. The Home Member and the Law Member of the Government of India had a private talk with Sastri and the two others. That incident was seized upon by the Nationalists to accuse them of having betrayed the people and to discount their opposition to the Bill as only a pretence, a put-up show. When the critics realised that Sastri's objection to the policy and principles of the Bill was as strong as ever and he was going to oppose the passing of the Bill, they accused him of having in turn betrayed the Government! Sastri felt deeply hurt and took the step, unusual for him, of explaining his position. In the course of his statement, he said:

"Though highly sensitive by nature, I do not think it right to make public complaint against every act of misrepresentation or unjust censure. An episode in the Rowlatt Bills agitation, however, has gone such lengths that friends—heaven be thanked, still I have many—may well wonder what I have done to draw so much thunder and lightning. The simple truth is that, after the opening debate was over, the Home Member wished to discuss the matter with Mr. [Surendranath] Banerjee, Dr. [Tej Bahadur] Sapru and myself. We saw him, the Law Member being also present. It is not right to disclose the particulars, but this may be said—that the discussion led to no compromise or compact. . . . The ingenuity of some journalists has led them to assert that one of the terms of the compact was that Mr. Banerjee was to go on opposing the Bill as though there was no compact! . . . The Madras critic . . . is very resourceful. Being satisfied that we are going to oppose the Bills to the end, he does not abandon the theory of a compact between Government and us, as any simple critic might be inclined to do. No, he is not to be beaten so easily. He says the compact is there; only the wretched Moderates, our plot having been discovered, are now going to betray the Government! Having first sold the public to the Government, we are about to reverse the process and sell the Government to the people!"

Sastri then regretted the fall in the standard of public criticism:

"Time was when, a public man having denied that he said, meant or did a certain thing, the others agreed to drop the matter. One would earnestly plead for the revival of the rule. It would work well on the whole. I dare not ask for the resuscitation of that more ancient rule that a man should not be condemned before his guilt is established. No true Moderate ever seeks the unattainable. . . . Will the public let us off? My hope is not dead yet."<sup>2</sup>

The Government's determination to proceed with the Rowlatt Bill antagonised Indian public opinion of all shades as never before. Among its leaders, only Dr. Annie Besant saw no harm in the legislation, for she said that "brickbats had to be met by bullets." To other leaders, the Bill meant more than what it said: it meant revival of distrust and mortal insult to Indians and sabotage of the Montagu Reforms as the War was over and India's goodwill was dispensable. Mahatma Gandhi was one of them. On March 1, 1919, he published a pledge that the Bill, if enacted, as well as other selected laws, would be disobeyed civilly and set about organizing passive resistance on an extensive scale, and led an agitation so intensive as to be without parallel in recent years.

The fateful Bill was finally passed on March 18, 1919, by 35 votes against 20 but only after the Viceroy-President had suspended the Rules of Business. Sastri made his last stand against the ill-fated Bill. Pathetically he cried out: "Whatever this Bill does, it does not yet forbid a man to cry when he is hurt." And he continued:

"We feel very strongly that the Bill is not now necessary, that it is not emergent, that it is inopportune, and we believe in the strength of our belief that this cannot be unknown to Government. . . .

My Lord, a little while ago my Hon'ble friend Mr. Surendranath Banerjee made an appeal to the European members of this Council and to the European community generally, based on their past history, on the struggles through which their forefathers went before they obtained constitutional liberty. That was a noble appeal, and if I refrain from repeating that noble appeal, it is not because I do not believe in it, but I wish for one moment to appeal to our friends on a somewhat lower ground.

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, March 6, 1919, p. 54.

I ask them to remember that this Bill of downright coercion is meant to deal with the people of India. It is not going to apply to them at all, unless certain members thereof in the excess of their zeal for the peoples' liberty—a rather uncommon quality—unless in the excess of such a love of liberty, they choose to ally themselves with the fortunes of downtrodden people of India. Well, so secure from the evil effects of this measure, it may be proper for us to appeal to their sympathy and to their chivalry, if not actually to their support. If they could not stand by us in this struggle, let them at least refrain from casting insinuations as to our loyalty; let them at least refrain from saying what they have often said both in and out that Indians, who oppose this measure, are not only showing their incapacity for responsible government—that is nothing—but are likewise exhibiting criminal sympathy with all forms of sedition and anarchic crime."

Sastri thought that the Bill was being enacted at the time because of the fear of the European community in India of losing their privileged status under the new Reforms and of the difficulty of enacting such a law under the new dispensation. In sorrow and anguish and dire forebodings, he concluded:

"In a few minutes more this Bill will be law, and when the Bill is law it does not remain there; we have still the aftermath, the consequences of the law to the Government of India no less than to us. For, as the poet once said in a tragic connection, 'If it were done when it is done, then it were well it was done quickly.' I will not go further with this awesome passage; but the darkened page is there, and unfortunately, although some of us have tried to dissuade him from the course, Mr. Gandhi has taken it up. Well, I know how he will play his part; his character will be bold, blameless, perfectly white. I could wish, Your Excellency, although I trust but faintly; that those of us who have also to write on this darkened page, his followers, the Government and the Government employees, we political agitators and detenus, that we could all say at the end of the business that we also wrote perfectly white."<sup>a</sup>

It was prophetic of the tragic events that swiftly followed, culminating in the massacre in the Jalianwala

<sup>a</sup> Indian Legislative Council, March 18, 1919, pp. 1189-90.

Bagh, Amritsar, by General Dyer and the frightfulness of Sir Michael O'Dwyer's administration of the Punjab in the next few weeks.

When Mahatma Gandhi started Non-cooperation as a protest against the Rowlatt Bill, the position of Sastri and the Liberals became somewhat difficult. The Government expected the Liberals to rally to its support as the test of their sense of responsibility and capacity to govern India. Speaking in Poona on April 25, 1919, Sastri explained the policy of the Liberals towards the Rowlatt Act, Satyagraha and the Montford Reforms. Concerning the disturbances, he said: "We must render to the Government every assistance in our power to bring the rioters to justice. Of that duty we are fully conscious, and it is necessary to assure the Government that both from our party and from other parties they are justified in expecting cordial help."

In his opinion, the obstinacy of the Government was responsible for the troubles: "We did our best to minimise the evil. We warned them at the time that the agitation which would follow would be unparalleled. They said it was an idle threat. An influential member of the Government turned to me laughingly and said: 'I have seen India ablaze twenty times, and I am sure this will blow over.' I hope it will blow over but, I am afraid, not before it had worked some amount of harm. They would not be warned. They would not listen to our representations made in good faith. . . . It is unreasonable to expect us to change our attitude to the Act, simply because of the unhappy events of the last few days." And he emphatically declared: "We cannot love the Act, and cannot pardon or excuse its authors for reaping the harvest of their own obstinacy." He was critical also of the Satyagraha movement, which the Mahatma started and then suspended: "I must say, in the next place, that the Satyagraha movement, though Mr. Gandhi has now suspended the civil disobedience part thereof, has, in its turn, contributed to the difficulties of the situation. I am one of those who hold that it was not the intrinsic nature of Satyagraha that led to the outbreaks of disorder; nor were these intended. Nevertheless, it is difficult to dissociate them entirely from a movement which brought together an unprecedentedly large mob in a highly excited frame of mind, and from the undesirable forms it subsequently assumed." Of the Mahatma he said: "You

will see that with his extraordinary readiness to take the responsibility even when it does not directly rest on him, Mr. Gandhi himself admits that he failed to appreciate in its fullness the absolute inability of the mob to rise to the height of the Satyagraha-plan and that he failed to take full note of the extent of the excesses which might be committed under its cover. When Mr. Gandhi is so ready to take upon himself the blame of it all, it is ungracious—highly ungracious—to dwell long on it. We recognise the unfortunate, though indirect connection between the Satyagraha movement and the disturbances; but no one thinks that Mr. Gandhi had anything to do with them.... We know that nobody is so unhappy over these events as Mr. Gandhi himself." At the same time, Sastri severely condemned the steps taken by the Government to put down the disturbances: "I do not wish to say anything out of a mere desire to speak against the Government, nor out of a desire to represent myself as a strong exponent of popular discontent. But I cannot withhold my very strong disapprobation of the lines which the Government has taken.... A state of open rebellion has been declared; martial law proclaimed and other things done in ways which must be pronounced barbarous. Bombs are dropped from aeroplanes, and people alleged to have disobeyed laws whipped in public streets, a barbarity which we all thought had passed away with the autocracy of Russia.... The saddest feature of the situation in the Punjab is that the measures taken are on such a scale of violence and barbarity that it will be long, long before men's minds are brought back to equilibrium." Sastri then considered the effect of the unhappy events in the Punjab on the Reform proposals. The enemies of Indian Reforms would exploit them to delay or whittle them down. "I well remember that, some time ago, when I was writing a pamphlet on the Congress-League Scheme, I said in a prophetic sort of spirit that, whenever any scheme for the liberalisation of the administration is afoot, the forces of reaction gather such a head that they would even create trouble to show that they were right in saying that the country was still unfit for any reform." *The Times* of London had said that reforms should be put off or whittled down. He, however, hoped that the friends of India in England would accelerate them and use them to allay discontent. He summed up his anticipations: "We shall all

undoubtedly endeavour to the best of our power to improve the scheme; but the chief part of our energy will have to be directed towards saving the scheme."

The Indian National Congress set up a committee, which included Mahatma Gandhi, to report on the Punjab happenings. It reported on March 25, 1920, and convicted the authorities of abominable excesses and brutalities with a view to teaching a lesson to Indians. The Government of India appointed an official committee, presided over by Lord Hunter. Its Report, which was published on May 28, 1920, was divided on racial lines. The British members, who formed the majority, took the view that there was a "rebellion" which had to be suppressed, while the Indian members, who formed the minority, thought that it was a "disturbance," not amounting to a rebellion, and condemned the action of the authorities. British opinion in India and Britain supported the majority view, while Indian opinion did the opposite. The British Government took the view that General Dyer had acted to the best of his lights and with sincerity and unflinching adherence to duty, and was guilty only of an honest error of judgment! Indian opinion was hurt and humiliated as never before. Racial antipathy rose to boiling point.

As Secretary of State for India, Montagu had to give expression in Parliament to the British Government's view. In consequence, he came in for severe criticism and his zeal for the Reforms became suspect in some Indian quarters. Knowing Montagu as he did, Sastri thought that Indian opinion was unduly hard on Montagu for the British Government's comments on the Hunter Reports. He recalled that Montagu was most unhappy over the Punjab happenings. The eulogy of Sir Michael O'Dwyer was not Montagu's but of the British Cabinet, forced on him. The inordinate delay in publishing the Reports was due to the protracted struggle that Montagu had put up in the Cabinet about the rights and wrongs of the grave issues involved.

The Indian Nationalists were so wroth with the Indian Liberals that some of them occasionally invented stories to discredit them. The attack on Sastri was more pointed, as he was a friend of Montagu and was championing his Reforms. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta published a story that a "venerable" Liberal had canvassed Sastri's support for the Majority Report of the Hunter Committee!



Sastri had to disclaim it as "utterly baseless"; he had no such communication and would be greatly surprised to receive one. The insinuation that he was capable of supporting the Majority Report gave him deep pain, but he could not pretend to be disappointed. He, of course, supported the Minority Report.

"As soon as it was known that there was a European Majority Report and an Indian Minority Report, any one could have foreseen that the European public would be guided by the one and the Indian public by the other. Nor was there much doubt that Government would in this, as in other matters of the kind, follow European in preference to Indian opinion. . . . If the victims of Jalianwala Bagh had not been Indian but English, or even Irish, we should have heard a little less of 'the moral effect of a massacre' or General Dyer's honesty of purpose or unflinching adherence to his own conception of duty. . . . In honest English the moral effect desired by General Dyer was a feeling of abject terror and racial defencelessness, and his conception of duty was jingoism of the most unredeemed type. . . . To consider infamy of this nature sufficiently punished by removal [of General Dyer] from the Indian command—the command elsewhere being open—is to mock justice, outrage Indian sentiment, and condone brutality if practised on coloured people for the glorification of the British race. . . . When one passes in review the wickednesses that are to be dealt with, one is painfully surprised at the state of mind which selects censure as the ordinary or typical action that will be suitable."

The Government of India's Despatch on the Hunter Reports blamed the Civil Disobedience movement of Mahatma Gaudhi. Sastri commented:

"If, in addition to admonishing Mr. Gandhi and the general public, they had expressed penitence for the Rowlatt Act and other causes of grave provocation . . . and manifested some slight remorse for the violence, frightfulness and the humiliation to which, through their facile compliance and imperfect control, they allowed the unhappy people of the Punjab to be subjected, the Indian subjects of His Majesty might have the small consolation that their unparalleled and unmerited sufferings had taught a valuable lesson to their rulers. As it is, they have to suffer and be rebuked into the bargain."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Servant of India*, June 1920, p. 206.

After going through the text of the Hunter Report, Sastri wrote again, and in the course of it he recalled that a European colleague of his in the Indian Legislative Council had recalled in February last that Sastri's awful prognostication at the enactment of the Rowlatt Act had come true:

"After a perusal of the Reports I am unable to say that Government, not to speak of their employees, have come well out of this affair. They began with bad statesmanship, then they showed lack of prescience, caught the panic of the European community and dropped the reins altogether. Now the whole tale of suffering is unfolded, they do not perform the only reparation they can. They do not own up. They will not punish their guilty servants. They leave a sense of deep wrong, deepened further by a sense of humiliation and helplessness."

Deeply as he felt the humiliation, Sastri did not give up hope in the British Empire:

"I summon all my philosophy to my aid and just save myself from being upset. I remember that, of the great imperial nations of the world, the British are the least oppressive and cruel by nature. . . . If even they fail in justice and humanity, it is a sad reminder how far mankind is from the conquest of primitive passions or realisation of moral purity. Till angels come down to rule us, it is folly to let our hearts be turned from loyalty. As to the alternative of self-rule, I am convinced that the quickest way to it lies through the British Empire."

Sastri wished that the Hunter Committee Report should be formally discussed in the Indian Legislative Council, and gave due notice of a resolution on the subject. But it was disallowed by the Viceroy, who was the President of the Council, on September 18, 1920. In doing so, he said: "The Resolution in itself was a legitimate one, and when I say that it was Mr. Sastri who wished to move it, you will understand that I was prompted by a genuine feeling and sincerity of purpose. I felt, however, that if peace and goodwill are at any time to be restored to the Punjab, these public discussions of the happenings of last year must as far as possible be brought to an end. . . . We have enough hatred and passion, and what we want is goodwill and peace. It is with this object and this object alone that I have excluded

the subject from discussion in this Council." Whereupon Sastri refused to move his other resolutions and walked out of the Council in protest. That was perhaps the only occasion when he staged a walk-out!

The Viceroy's action did not restore goodwill. In his report on the situation in India at the beginning of 1921, the Special Correspondent of the London *Times* said that the wound left by the Punjab tragedy was incomparably deeper, and unless Government, on its initiative, took definite steps to assuage the rankling sense of racial humiliation, the Montagu Reforms would be inaugurated in the worst possible atmosphere. But the advice was not taken. *The Times* itself repudiated it. A public wrong was not publicly righted. On the other hand, the House of Lords had voted thanks to General Dyer, the perpetrator of the Jalianwala massacres! During the last week of December, 1920, Sastri, in the name of the future of India, appealed to the people to forget the Punjab wrong and to the Government to enable them to do so by appropriate action.

In inaugurating the new Montagu Constitution in February, 1921, His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught announced the Message of His Imperial Majesty, the King Emperor, that the principle of autocracy was ended in the governance of India. The aged Duke made a personal appeal to Indians and Britishers.

"Since I landed I have felt around me the bitterness and estrangement between those who have been and should be friends. The shadow of Amritsar has lengthened over the fair face of India. . . . No one deplored these events more intensely than I do myself.

"I have reached a time of life when I most desire to heal wounds and to re-unite those who have been disunited. In what must be, I fear, my last visit to the India I love so well . . . I am moved to make you a personal appeal, put in simple words that come from my heart, not to be coldly and critically interpreted.

"My experience tells me that misunderstandings usually mean mistakes on either side. As an old friend of India, I appeal to you all—British and Indians—to bury with the dead past the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past, to forgive where you have to forgive, to join hands and to work together to realise the hopes that arise from today."

The venerable Duke's appeal deeply moved India. There was, however, some disappointment that the King Emperor's Message contained no expression of regret for the excesses committed by officials in the Punjab.

There was, however, a marked change in the attitude of the Government of India under the new Constitution. On February 14, 1921, Government expressed regret for the Punjab excesses and detailed the disciplinary action taken against some of the offending officials. Soon after, the Rowlatt Act itself was repealed. And so ended the unhappy Rowlatt Chapter.

## MONTAGU PROPOSALS

SASTRI had several interviews with Montagu while the latter was touring India. As early as 1912, he had publicly recognised Montagu's character and ability and the promise he gave of greatness. The occasion was Montagu's famous Cambridge speech on Provincial Autonomy for India. In 1911, the Government of India under Lord Hardinge, a liberal Viceroy, had, in a Despatch to the Secretary of State for India, Lord Crew, recommended that the Governments of the Provinces should increasingly be released from the control of the Government of India and become responsible to the provincial legislatures. Under pressure of reactionary criticism, Lord Crew explained away the promise. It created grave disappointment in Indian political circles. Montagu, who was then the Under-Secretary of State for India, made a speech in Cambridge in which he gave a progressive interpretation to provincial autonomy and restored hope among Indians. He was charged with indiscipline in contradicting his chief, the Secretary of State for India. Commending Montagu's stand, Sastri wrote: "Mr. Montagu starts his official connection with India with a vivid perception of the ideas and tendencies of the present time. It is a rare joy to find emerging now and then from the Liberal ranks a young politician of his stamp, endowed with imagination to understand and the courage to welcome openly the struggle for constitutional freedom of a people held in political dependence."

Montagu noted in his *Diary* of December 20, 1917, at Madras:

"I at last met Srinivasa Sastri, Gokhale's successor as Servant

of India, and a thoroughly sound man. He argued in favour of the Congress-Muslim League Scheme, but finally said he would accept any scheme which fulfilled four conditions:

1. There must be elements of progress and a guarantee of progress in the scheme itself.

2. The step must be substantial and not hedged round. There must be no humiliating stipulations as to fitness.

3. India should have fiscal liberty. I said that the principle must be settled by an Imperial Conference.

4. Absolute equality between races.

I am quite sure he is on right lines. . . . I am quite sure, also, that the Government must issue a public declaration to the Governments that they must work the Scheme and that civil servants must not obstruct. Chelmsford and the Government of India want to do as little as they need. I think it is absolutely essential that they should do as much as they can. Grudging giving has always been the bane of Indian administration. I am going to tell Chelmsford so.

Sastri is much in favour of a conference at Delhi of non-official Indians. . . . They should be Moderates, because a time is coming when we shall have to declare war on the Extremists. He is anxious that we should invite a deputation to England."<sup>1</sup>

The same evening in Madras at the Cosmopolitan Club Montagu met Sastri again and noted in his *Diary*: "I had a long talk again with Sastri, who is going to be most helpful."<sup>2</sup>

Montagu listened to the debate in the Indian Legislative Council on February 6, 1918, on a resolution in favour of linguistic states. Sastri opposed it. Montagu recorded in his *Diary*: "I think the really good speech of the day was from Sastri, well delivered, well phrased and very impressive, urging the rejection of the motion."<sup>3</sup>

During his tour in India, Montagu was discussing with officials as well as non-officials his tentative scheme of reforms for India, one of the principal features of which was Diarchy in the Provinces. At one stage, it was proposed to have two separate Governments, one for the Reserved and the other for the Transferred subjects with the Governor as the common link. Sastri was opposed to such division. Montagu noted Sastri to say: "For God's sake, do not

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Montagu, *An Indian Diary*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

separate us into an A house and a B house. We want to work with the officials and not be penned off from them."<sup>4</sup>

Sastri had a long interview with Montagu and Chelmsford on January 31, 1918, and was told of the reforms scheme as it had developed to that date. Montagu was depressed because Sastri would not commit himself. He noted in his *Diary*: "This does not look, from the so-called leader of the Moderates of India, like any enthusiasm for the scheme. . . . I think our remedies fall far short of the circumstances of the country. Sastri reverted to the idea of discussing the matter with chosen Indians."<sup>5</sup> Sastri had another interview with Montagu on March 13, 1918, when the latter took all the time expounding his scheme. At lunch the same day Sastri was, according to Montagu, very depressed because he was accused by a friend of his in Madras to have promised to support whatever Montagu recommended. Sastri warned Montagu that there was no chance of general support for his proposals.

In these interviews the foundation was laid for close and continuous cooperation between Montagu and Sastri, and they became great friends and admirers.

Sastri continued his vigorous propaganda in favour of the Congress-League Scheme. Nevertheless, he was accused by some critics that he had given an undertaking to Montagu to support his proposals unreservedly even if they fell short of the Congress-League Scheme. The repressive policy of the Government of India under Lord Chelmsford lent credence to a strong suspicion that the Montagu-Chelmsford Report would not be sufficiently progressive, and it led to a controversy on its "rejection or acceptance" when published and on resort to passive resistance. On the eve of the publication of the Report, Sastri repudiated the allegation that he had given his advance consent to the Montagu proposals and pleaded for their calm and objective appraisal, when published. He said:

"I am one of those who have been held up to the odium of the public as a small knot of politicians pledged to support and recommend to the country any reforms, however slight, that the Secretary of State may offer. I am not so pledged. I do not know that any one is so pledged. The Viceroy and the Secretary of State did me the honour to invite me to some conversations on

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

the proposals before them. I tried, as far as I could, to interpret to them the best mind of India. But they told me only parts of the scheme of reforms, and to this day I have no knowledge of it in its entirety, and am free, like any fellow citizen of mine, to judge it when published on merits and act according to my judgment.

"With this personal explanation I write these lines to my countrymen as one who loves and would serve them, if he may. My words will, of course, have weight only with those who have not made up their minds that I have sold my country for office, title or other personal gain."

He repeated his allegiance to the Congress-League Scheme: "I took a share from the very beginning in the shaping of the Congress-League Scheme; I have expounded it with pride and zeal in writing and by speech, and a humble part of the work of educating the country on it fell to my lot."

He even thought that the Congress-League Scheme was "on the whole superior to the scheme which is on the eve of publication, being laid on existing foundations and requiring no scrapping of the existing machinery." Nevertheless, the Montagu proposals should be examined objectively to see if the "basic principles" of the Congress-League Scheme were preserved, as distinguished from its minutiae. As enunciated by Tilak, the principles were: a substantial elective majority in the legislature, the subordination of the executive to the legislature and control of finance by the legislature. If the Montagu proposals embodied these principles, they should be entertained and considered; if not, they should be rejected.

Sastri reiterated his preference for the "non-responsible" executive of the Congress-League Scheme as against the "responsible" executive promised in the Montagu Declaration: "Allusion has been made to responsible government, which the proposals of the Secretary of State may seek to embody. Personally, I have argued against it even as an ideal. I believe that the examples of America, Japan and Switzerland have more application to the case of India than those of Great Britain, France and Italy." He, however, realised that the "canonical doctrine" was entirely in favour of the "responsible" system, but would implement it with caution: "By universal consent a system of ins and



outs, unless it is evolved naturally out of long practice of representative institutions, is attended with so many risks that, at least in its inception, limitations may be considered necessary as to its scope." Sastri considered the fact that the Montagu proposals had not yet received the approval of the British War Cabinet was an advantage rather than otherwise, for there was scope to improve them before the British Cabinet got committed. In fact, he had himself strongly urged that course. He finally pleaded that those who preferred acceptance to rejection should stand by the proposals openly and strengthen the hands of Montagu to put them through the British Parliament, in spite of the opposition of the British die-hards and Indian Extremists. Indian opposition, instead of liberalising the Montagu proposals, was more likely to end in their abandonment. The consequences would create greater discontent and disorder in India and throw the country into lamentable chaos: "To an abnormal type of mind, political disorder may appear a necessary preliminary to the establishment of a happier polity than India has ever known before. If we throw everything into chaos, God will know how to bring cosmos out of it. That is it." He warned: "The forces that will be unloosed we cannot hope to control or regulate, and we shall hopelessly thicken the problems of our children because we choose to neglect a comparatively easy solution in our time." And he reiterated his faith in constitutional agitation: "I have said before and will say it again that we are far from having exhausted the possibilities of constitutional agitation in India. It is not impossible for us to attain by methods of peace what elsewhere and at other times has cost the shedding of much blood and the misery of many generations. Mr. Gokhale worked in that faith to the end. I have that faith too and would fain communicate it to others." He defended the philosophy of the Indian Moderates or Liberals:

"Moderation has no doubt fallen on evil times. But why should it hang down its head and go about with an apology always on its lips? . . . Men of the Moderate school have no need to be ashamed either of their name or of their policy. It is no crime to be in the minority. It cannot be unpatriotic to say yes when they feel yes. To be rallied by an English politician is not wrong when they are rallied to the standard of peaceful and

substantial progress. On the lips of the sneering majority, expressions of noble import are often degraded. Rallying the Moderates, sobriety, statesmanship are not despicable because they are now generally despised. Let us be true to our convictions and remember that a single turn of events may prove us right. History honours Cavour as well as Mazzini, and Emmanuel has a noble niche in the hall of fame by the side of Garibaldi."<sup>6</sup>

The Montagu-Chelmsford Report was published on July 4, 1918. Broadly speaking, it recommended Diarchy in the provinces, under which certain "transferred" subjects would be administered by Ministers "responsible" to the legislatures, and certain "reserved" subjects which would be in charge of Executive Councillors not "responsible" to the legislatures, while the Government of India was not to be "responsible" to the Indian Legislature for any subject. It also provided for periodic reviews with a view to determining the next stage of reform. While there was a general chorus of praise for the element of "responsible" government, there was sharp difference of opinion regarding the Report as a whole. Mrs. Besant declared that the Montagu proposals were "unworthy of England to offer and unworthy of India to accept." Disappointment was largely due because there was no element of "responsibility" in the Government of India, because there was to be periodical examinations of India's fitness for extension of "responsible" government and because the legislatures were not given power over the purse. Opinion in favour of rejection of the proposals gained strength not only because of the unsatisfactory character of the proposals and the ominous Rowlatt Report which was published about that time, but also from considerations of strategy. Rejection might lead to a better offer, particularly as the War was still on, and England needed the co-operation of India in prosecuting it. Mrs. Besant had said earlier that England's need was India's opportunity.

Sastri, too, was dissatisfied. But his approach was: accept and seek improvements. While he still preferred the Congress-League Scheme, he was reconciled somewhat reluctantly to the Montagu proposals, partly because "responsible" government conformed to the Montagu Declaration of August 20, 1917, and partly because of the

<sup>6</sup> *Servant of India*, July 4, 1918, p. 235.

"almost superstitious veneration in which lovers of the British Constitution hold the power of making and unmaking ministries as the highest symbol of fully developed popular government," and partly because the British preferred precedents to innovations.

Sastri compared the Montagu proposals with the Congress-League Scheme. The claim to elective majorities in the legislature was substantially met; subordination of the executive to the legislatures was partly met in the Provinces but denied in the Centre. But no financial control was given to the legislatures. The relieving feature was that the first step was not to be the last and progressive realisation of full responsible government both in the Provinces and in the Centre was contemplated.

Sastri thought that the Montagu proposals would not be enthusiastically received by any section of progressive Indian opinion and pleaded that the defects should be removed and the proposals made more acceptable. He was, however, opposed to rejection. He advocated acceptance of the proposals to be accompanied by efforts to improve them. "People should remember that it is a rare opportunity they have. To throw it away would be madness. In Mr. Montagu we have a politician of great calibre, strength of will and genuine passion for progress all round. . . . We know that he is eager to receive helpful suggestions for improving his proposals. . . . Let us not reject the scheme with contumely. What does it matter that it departs altogether from ours? It substantially embodies our basic principles at the start and will effectuate them in full at the culmination." He concluded: "To recognise that the authors of the scheme have been actuated by a genuine desire to promote the interests of India and help the cause of her freedom, to admit that the lines of constitutional advance laid down in it are generally sound and that the actual proposals are calculated to give us a substantial start and set us on the high road to partnership in the British Empire at no distant date, and then to point out deficiencies that vitiate the scheme and may deprive it of all value and make a firm and strong demand for improvements that seem indispensable--this is the part of those who would use the great opportunity that Providence has given them to serve the cause of India." Unlike Tilak and Mrs. Besant, both

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, July 11, 1918, p. 245.

Mahatma Gandhi and Mr. M. A. Jinnah took a sympathetic view of the Montagu proposals. Gandhi said: "Both Mr. Montagu and Lord Chelmsford have been inspired by an honest desire for a due fulfilment of the declaration of the 20th August and for the welfare of India. They have taken great pains over their most difficult and delicate task; I cannot but think that any hasty rejection of the scheme will be a misfortune for the country. In my humble opinion, the scheme deserves a sympathetic handling rather than a summary rejection. But it would need to be considerably improved before it is accepted by the reformers."<sup>8</sup> Mr. Jinnah said: "The report and proposals are weighty and well-considered and cannot be rejected summarily. Great effort has been made to face the problem, but I cannot say that I am satisfied with the scheme as it stands. It will not be acceptable to the people unless it is modified in important respects."<sup>9</sup> The special session of the Congress held in Bombay on August 29, 1918, took a different line. It reaffirmed the principles of reform contained in the Congress-League Scheme and then went on to say that nothing less than full responsible government within the Empire would satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the Indian people, and suggested several amendments to bring the Montagu proposals into line with its demands.

Soon after, on September 6, 1918, a non-official resolution was moved in the Indian Legislative Council which recognised the Montford proposals "as a genuine effort and a definite advance towards the progressive realisation of responsible government in India," and recommended that a committee of officials and non-officials should be appointed to consider and report on them. Some non-officials, who had taken the cue from the special session of the Congress held in the previous week in Bombay, opposed the resolution and characterised the proposals as "unsatisfactory and disappointing." Sastri, who had deliberately abstained from the Congress session to be free from its crippling mandate, supported the resolution and welcomed the proposals as a "great programme of reform sanctioned by the highest authority." He deprecated the prescription of a time-limit for the attainment of full responsible government and anticipated that even under the procedure recommended by the Montford Report, India would reach her

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1918, p. 265.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, July 25, 1918, p. 265.

goal in about thirty years from then. It was a remarkable coincidence that India attained her independence in 1947, thirty years after the Montagu Declaration of 1917.

In view of the growing opposition to the Montagu Reforms, Sastri felt the need for a journal, which besides propagating the Liberal philosophy of Ranade and Gokhale followed by him and the Servants of India Society, would also stand by the Montagu Reforms. For this purpose he founded the English weekly, the *Servant of India*, in Poona on February 19, 1918, the third anniversary of the death of Gokhale. In his first leading article as Editor, he declared its policy as the interpretation in a broad sense of the principles of Gokhale. It would emulate the fine poise, the dignity and the moral earnestness of Gokhale. It would remember in the heat of debate and the sting of abuse, that Gokhale, though loyal to his party, was not a partisan; that in judging his opponents he was chivalrous to a degree; and that he sternly reprobated all sweeping assertions to the prejudice of a class or community. Though he was never an official in the exercise of power over men, he had a keen sense of the difficulties of administration and would not lightly disturb the moral foundations on which respect and obedience to authority rested. Though an acute and unsparing critic of the measures of Government when he disapproved of them, he never hardened into a persistent opponent of Government and vividly realised the need for a strong Government. Sastri pleaded that adherence to the principles of Gokhale did not mean a meticulous paraphrase of his utterances, but only to the living spirit and not dead formulæ.

Sastri continued to be Editor of the weekly until his frequent and prolonged absences abroad obliged him to relinquish it in favour of his colleague in the Society, Mr. S. G. Vaze, who conducted it with great ability and loyalty to its principles, until it was closed down in October, 1939.

Sastri felt the need also for an all-India organization to stand by the Montagu Reforms. After having talks with Mrs. Besant, Jinnah, the Raja of Muhammadabad and others in Bombay, Sastri went to Calcutta to attend the conference of Moderates to discuss the Montagu proposals. On his return, he held anxious consultations with his colleagues in the Servants of India Society. Finally, along

with such Congress veterans as Sir Dinshah Wacha, Sir Surendranath Banerjee, Bhupendranath Basu and Ambica Charan Mazumdar, he helped to found the National Liberal Federation of India in Bombay on November 1, 1918, with a view to supporting the Montagu Reforms, while maintaining that they needed improvements.

The Federation's approach to the Montford Reforms was a complete contrast to that of the Special Session of the Congress. It accepted them whole-heartedly in the first instance and then sought to improve them, while the Congress rejected them, unless improved. At the same time, there was little difference regarding the desired improvements. Both wanted the Government of India liberalised; both wanted fiscal freedom for India, besides other improvements. The Federation recommended a new principle at the instance of Sastri. An individual of a community, which was given separate communal representation through communal electorates, should be free to enrol himself in the general electorate, if he wished. Nobody should be compelled to vote in a communal electorate. It was hoped that emancipation from narrow communalism would be possible and would be availed of by an increasing number of individuals with more liberal outlook.

While he abstained from attending the Special Session of the Indian National Congress in Bombay in August, 1918, and while he helped to found the National Liberal Federation of India, Sastri made an effort to influence the Congress in favour of the acceptance of the Montagu proposals. To this end, he attended the annual session of the Congress held in Delhi in the Christmas week of 1918. He moved amendments to delete the words "disappointing and unsatisfactory" in describing the proposals and also the stipulation that full responsible government should be reached within fifteen years. He failed. It is also noteworthy that even after six months of examination and discussion of the Montagu proposals, the Congress reiterated its preference for the Congress-League Scheme!

The publication of the Montford Report was soon followed by the appointment of two committees to make detailed recommendations regarding the franchise and the division of powers. Sastri was appointed to the Franchise Committee, under the Chairmanship of Lord Southborough. His inclusion infuriated the non-Brahmin organisations in

Madras, who accused him of having preferred a Brahmin oligarchy to an Indian democracy!

Sastri was born a Brahmin; he could not help it. But he never said that he favoured Brahmin oligarchy to Indian democracy. All that he said at the time was that he did not favour adult franchise. It was twisted by his non-Brahmin critics to mean something very different. They demanded that Sastri should be unseated and some non-Brahmin included in the Committee. As their demand was not fully met, they boycotted the Committee.

While the non-Brahmins attacked Sastri because he was a Brahmin, *The Hindu* and the nationalist press attacked him equally fiercely because he was a Moderate and supported the Montagu Reforms. Mr. P. Kesava Pillai, himself a Congressman and a non-Brahmin, was moved to protest against the attacks on Sastri from both these quarters. In the course of his letter published in the *Indian Patriot* of Madras, he said:

"Mr. Sastri is a level-headed and cultured man who has acquired wisdom enough to treat undignified and indecent personal attacks with indifference and pity, and has self-respect, patriotism, optimism, common sense and sound information of the constitutional systems in the civilised world to do signal service for his country in the Committee. Few Brahmins are as free from Brahmin prejudices as Mr. Sastri. And it is a thousand pities that such a public man, who has made sacrifices in life, is attacked, traduced, slandered and calumniated in and out of season by comparatively small men. By all means let Dr. Nair get in and plead for communal representation as he considers best; but to ask for Mr. Sastri's removal as a thing agreeable to non-Brahmins in general is a gross perversion of truth. Mr. Sastri's removal will be disastrous to the Congress cause, say what *The Hindu* may. And even the progressive and self-respecting non-Brahmins will be better served by him than by Dr. Nair, or any of his school or following."<sup>10</sup>

The net result of the agitation was that Sastri was not unseated and Nair was not seated, and the non-Brahmin representatives boycotted the Committee.

The chief contention of the non-Brahmins was that, though they constituted the large majority of voters and

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, October 24, 1918, p. 423.

their ratio to Brahmins was something like eight to one, they were not sure of adequate representation in the Councils because of the caste superiority of the Brahmins in Hindu society. They, therefore, demanded a separate communal electorate for non-Brahmins. The Southborough Committee, however, recommended reservation of seats for non-Brahmins on a common electoral roll. Sastri's own personal view was that communal electorates were undesirable and should be granted in special cases, but with built-in correctives, such as a time-limit and the option for individuals to prefer the common to the communal electorate, or change over from the latter to the former. He held to this view consistently and urged it repeatedly. In his evidence before the Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament later on, Sastri agreed to the reservation on a common roll of just over fifty per cent of the seats in the Madras Council for non-Brahmins. "The only thing I need add under this head is that, if such an expedient [reservation of seats] is finally decided upon, the proportion of thirty-one to sixty seats that the Government of India have recommended does not seem to be excessive, and it is this proportion which I should certainly support."<sup>11</sup> The Joint Select Committee also recommended reservation on a common roll and hoped that the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins would arrive at some agreement by mutual consent, failing which it should be left to an arbitrator to settle the proportion. The non-Brahmin leaders rejected the offer of fifty per cent of the seats made by Brahmins and demanded forty-two seats out of sixty-five. The arbitrator, Lord Meston, awarded twenty-eight<sup>12</sup> instead!

While the Montford proposals for reform were discounted by the Indian nationalists, they were bitterly opposed by the Tory die-hards in Britain who did not want any reform at all, but only the stern application of the Defence of India Act. Chelmsford himself was not quite as enthusiastic as Montagu for reform, for the Government of India's Despatch, signed on March 5, 1918, but published two months later, sought to water down the Montagu proposals considerably. By an unhappy coincidence, about the time the Montford Report was published was also published the Report of the Sedition Committee, presided over by Justice Sir Sydney Rowlatt, which recommended repressive legisla-

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, March 25, 1920, p. 85.



tion, referred to in the last chapter. The two Reports, one for reform and the other for repression, competed for public attention. The Rowlatt Report did not help to create a favourable atmosphere for the Montagu Report. The hope of Indian Liberals lay in Montagu. In order to strengthen his hands, a Deputation of Liberals went to Britain. It sailed from Bombay on April 28, 1919.

Sastri was a member of it. It was his first visit abroad. He had excused himself several times before because his aged and venerable mother wished that he should be by her side in her last days and perform her funeral rites in the regular orthodox manner. Now he was in a cruel dilemma. Ultimately, the call of public duty prevailed. With a heavy heart, he left for London. Soon after, his mother passed away, leaving him disconsolate and remorseful.

The Montagu Bill had its second reading in the House of Commons on June 5, 1919. In a letter written that day Sastri described the state of opinion in England with respect to India. India and her troubles vexed only a few persons. It was amusing that many an Englishman should admit his complete ignorance of India with almost the pride with which he might confess an amiable weakness! He was, however, gratified to find that among those who counted there was general support for the Reforms. He was one of the guests at a private dinner party in the House of Commons which consisted of members of various shades of opinion, and every one of them spoke in favour of the Reforms.

During his stay in England, Sastri was busy meeting important people and addressing meetings in support of the Montford Bill and its improvement. In a speech in Essex Hall, London, on July 2, 1919, he made a forceful and convincing plea for fiscal autonomy for India and quoted Montagu's support to it with great effect. He was the guest of Sir Michael and Lady Sadler in Leeds and met the editors of the leading newspapers. Conservative, Liberal and Labour, and also addressed the women workers of the city. At the Leeds Luncheon Club, under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Sadler, he spoke on "The Case for Constitutional Reform in India," in the course of which he said that the Liberal Party in India was content to make progress towards Responsible Government or Dominion Status by stages instead of in one bound, that the Montford Bill then

before Parliament represented the first of the stages and marked fairly substantial progress, though it needed improvements, and assured that there was no danger of unfair discrimination against British commercial interests in India or to the British Empire. In a letter dated July 2, 1919, to a common friend, Sir Michael wrote about Sastri's work in Leeds: "I have no hesitation in saying that his addresses have won respectful and cordial sympathy and support of the leading citizens—men and women. But far more than his spoken words, his personality has charmed and impressed those who have had the privilege of meeting him. And they are many and (in these parts) influential. . . . At the Luncheon Club his reception was brilliant, and the applause at the conclusion of the address significantly enthusiastic and prolonged."<sup>12</sup>

Sastri was a member of the Liberal Deputation which waited on Montagu on July 15, 1919. He had earlier spoken on the Reform Bill at the National Liberal Club. He gave evidence before the Joint Select Committee on August 15, 1919, and, among others, strongly pleaded for the introduction of an element of responsibility in the Government of India and for fiscal autonomy for India. Cabled reports from friends from London described Sastri's evidence as "highly impressive, informed and dignified"; and as "characterised by phenomenal mastery, independence, outspokenness and dignity." Mr. Jannadas Dwarakadas, a member of the Home Rule Delegation of Mrs. Besant, wrote in the *Bombay Chronicle*: "The one person who is rendering yeoman service is Mr. Sastri. His undoubtedly superb equipment, his lucid and convincing oratory and, above all, his selfless devotion to the Motherland have created a very favourable impression on the minds of those who count."<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Besant reported that the Joint Select Committee was tired when it heard Sastri, but his "admirably lucid criticisms of the Bill, expressed in most polished English and showing a firm grasp of the subject and a clear insight into consequences, soon awakened and riveted their attention. The Members evidently felt the statesmanlike quality of the witness before them and treated him with marked respect."<sup>14</sup> The London Correspondent of *The Hindu* of Madras said: "The form of

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, August 7, 1919, p. 323.    <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, September 4, 1919, p. 362.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, September 11, 1919, p. 373.

Mr. Srinivasa Sastri's opening statement was a model of conciseness and clarity of expression. He examined the Bill clause by clause in a masterly fashion, and the effect of his evidence was to show that the Bill as it stands now falls substantially short of the original scheme in many important respects."<sup>15</sup> Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, who was a member of Mrs. Besant's Deputation, said of Sastri's work: "There is not a name that stands higher in England today than that of Mr. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri. The impression he has created and the work he has done silently and unostentatiously are worthy of all praise." Lord Sydenham, a bitter opponent of political reform for India, was a member of the Joint Select Committee. He asked Sastri if the Servants of India Society had not, under his leadership, strayed away from its original social service objective to political agitation. Sastri discomfited him by recalling that when his Lordship was Governor of Bombay, he had visited the Society and had tea with Gokhale, who at the time was the foremost *politician*, and that His Lordship had presented some books to the Society which were highly *political*!

About this time Mrs. Besant started a weekly paper in London called *United India*, the first issue of which contained an article by Sastri on "The Central Government of India." In it Sastri reiterated the Indians' demands concerning that Government: namely, an element of responsibility, half the number of members of the Government to be Indians, and fiscal autonomy when the Government and the legislature were in agreement. At the Indian Conference, held under the auspices of "Britain and India," in October, 1919, Sastri delivered a brief but powerful address on "What India Wants," in which he declared that India wanted to be an equal partner in the Empire and not a dependency.

On November 22, 1919, Sastri and Mrs. Besant cabled their opinion to India on the Reforms and said that the Report of the Joint Select Committee had rejected all the reactionary recommendations of the Government of India and improved the Bill in many respects. They gave high praise to Lord Selbourne, the Chairman of the Committee, and Montagu and Lord Sinha, its members. "Mr. Montagu's courage, ability, tenacity and tact have won a great victory over the forces of reaction. He will have an abiding place

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, September 11, 1919, p. 373.

in the history of India. Of Lord Sinha's work, it is superfluous to speak. He has rendered his country unique service."<sup>16</sup> Of Sastri's own contribution, the London Correspondent of the *Leader* of Allahabad, Mr. H. S. L. Polak, wrote on November 27, 1919:

"Of Mr. Sastri it is more difficult to speak, for so much of his work has been of that quiet and unobtrusive kind that it is not advertised and does not come under the direct observation of more than a dozen people. But it is no exaggeration to say that no member of any Deputation has done so much as he to give the Bill its present shape. In many respects, he has shown that he is a worthy successor to his great leader, Mr. Gokhale. In this matter, too, Mr. Gokhale's mantle seems to have fallen on his shoulders and he has worn that majestic garment with an ease that would have delighted his master. India has cause to feel proud of Mr. Sastri, and it is a matter for astonishment and sorrow that such malicious attacks have been made upon him, not only in Madras where his enemies, by their very ferocity, render tribute to his great capacity and qualities, but also in Bombay, where, I hear one of the oldest members of his party speaks of him as a 'black sheep.' May there be many more such, might well be the prayer of patriotic Indians."<sup>17</sup>

Sastri left London on November 28, 1919, for India with the satisfaction that the Bill, as it emerged from the Joint Committee, would be enacted promptly. Soon after his arrival in Bombay he gave a series of lectures in support of the Reform Bill. "I see in the provisions no camouflage, no taking away with one hand what has been given by the other. The power and influence newly accorded are real and, if fully realised, cannot but lead in no long time to the goal. . . . While it is not possible to shut out all further agitation or stand still on the road to full autonomy, it is wise to remember that the process of digestion must be our main business for some years. . . . Supreme interest attaches, therefore, to the proceedings of the political assemblies that will meet in Amritsar and Calcutta in the next few days."

The Montagu Bill was passed in the last week of December, 1919, and was accompanied by an amnesty for political prisoners. Sastri hailed them with joy.

He attended the Congress but only for one day, as he

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, December 4, 1919, p. 521.    <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1, 1920, p. 575.

had to leave for Calcutta to attend the Liberal Federation. The Congress session was a triumph for Mahatma Gandhi; he secured the passage of a resolution regretting and condemning the excesses committed by the Indian mobs during the Punjab disturbances. The Resolution had been defeated in the Subjects Committee. Whereupon, politely and respectfully and withal firmly, he offered to withdraw from the Congress unless mob excesses, whatever was the provocation, was condemned by it. Speaking on the Resolution he unfolded his philosophy, which dominated his handling of the Congress since that eventful day. He said:

"There is no greater Resolution before the Congress than this one. The whole key to success in the future lies in your hearty recognition of the truth underlying it and acting up to it... I say if there was no violence on our part... these troubles would not have arisen. But the Government went mad at the time; we went mad also at the time I say, do not return madness with madness, but return madness with sanity and the whole situation will be yours."<sup>18</sup>

Gandhi had pleaded for cooperation for the success of the Reforms, but the opposition was so powerful that a compromise was finally adopted. It said that India was fit for full responsible government, that the Montagu Reforms were "inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing," that the Congress should take steps to establish full responsible government in accordance with the principle of self-determination which had been proclaimed by the American President, Woodrow Wilson, and, pending such establishment, work the Montagu Reforms with a view to promoting it. Thus began the Gandhian Era in Indian politics.

Sastri took part in the deliberations of the National Liberal Federation in Calcutta. Regarding the Reforms, it said among other things: "The Liberal Party will work for the success of the constitutional reforms by following a policy of cooperation and of promoting good understanding among the different communities and interests in the country."<sup>19</sup>

Sastri spoke in support of the Resolution and pleaded that, though it was a matter for regret that the Reforms

<sup>18</sup> B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Congress*, Vol. I, p. 307.

<sup>19</sup> *Servant of India*, January 8, 1920, p. 586.

Act ignored the unanimous Indian demand for an element of responsibility in the Central Government, it contained several welcome improvements over the Montford proposals. He pleaded that all, including the officials as well as the Congress, should cooperate in working the Act and making the most of it for India's benefit. He pleaded for a radical change of outlook from that of "outsiders" to that of "insiders," from that of critics to that of partners.

After the session of the Liberal Federation in Calcutta during Christmas 1919, Sastri visited many places to defend the Montagu Reforms and win public support for them and combat the ideas put forward by some Congress stalwarts that the Act should be worked, not to make it a success, but to prove it unworkable and worthless. In a speech to the Madras Liberal League on January 8, 1920, Sastri pleaded that people should enter the new Councils, not as party-men, but as patriots: "The time has come now to grow out of ourselves. If you please, let there be no Moderates or Extremists anywhere. Let us all be Indian citizens of tomorrow in working this new Act. . . . We must make up our minds that the new councils should be filled, not with men of this party or that, but with the best men who are willing to serve the public, whatever parties they may have hitherto belonged to. For, I am certain that this Act can be worked only on this condition." He regretted the wrong lead given by the Congress, which once had enormous moral authority but had then grievously forfeited it. Sastri had to face attacks not only from the non-Brahmins, not only from the Nationalists and Congressmen, but from occasional misreporting by the Associated Press of India, then the leading news agency. When in the above speech Sastri spoke of the "moral authority" of the Congress, the Associated Press telegraphed "moral purity"!

In a great speech he delivered at the Deccan Sabha, Poona, on January 25, 1920, Sastri defended the Moderate Deputation's work in England and regretted the attitude of wrecking the Act professed by some Congressmen. At the outset, he gave full credit to all the Deputations for their good work, but pointed out that the Congress claim that the Moderate Deputation was superfluous, a handicap and a hindrance, was untenable on the showing of the Congress itself. "The Moderate Deputation adopted the position of friends and supporters of the Reform Scheme from the

beginning, urging improvements in it to make it fully satisfactory. Others assumed the rôle of critics, relentless critics, of the Scheme in all its stages." And yet it was complained that the Moderates alone were in the confidence of the Secretary of State and other authorities in England. The two lines of criticism were mutually incompatible.

It was incongruous that that Congress which had bitterly criticised the Montagu Reforms should later claim that it alone could work them and work them in order to wreck them! Some of the Congress leaders had privately said that it was only a tactical move to impress the people in England, for, if, because of its complicated character, the Act should break down, the blame could be laid on the British Government! Sastri deprecated such moves. He hoped that some of the Congressmen would follow the lead of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and work the Act honestly. And he hoped that the other section of the Congress would also follow their lead.

## MAHATMA GANDHI'S NON-COOPERATION

THE Congress Resolution on the Reforms, passed in December, 1919, lent itself to opposite interpretations: working or wrecking. Factors unconnected with their merits influenced the Congress to prefer wrecking. The Report of the Hunter Committee infuriated Indian public opinion against the Government. On top of it, the dismemberment of Turkey as the penalty for her defeat in World War I incensed the Muslims in India who held the Sultan of Turkey in high regard as the Khalifa. In indignant despair, the Indian Khilafat Committee resolved on May 28, 1920, to resort to Mahatma Gandhi's idea of Non-cooperation as the only means left to give vent to Muslim grievance. The chivalrous Mahatma felt that the Congress should make common cause with the Khilafat Committee. Many other Congress leaders like Tilak were not keen on it, as, in their view, the Khilafat was a religious issue outside the range of the Congress interest. As a compromise, the Congress Committee decided to bracket the Indian grievance against the Majority Report of the Hunter Committee with the Muslim grievance in regard to the Khilafat and make them both the justification for Non-cooperation with the Government. It was only at the Nagpur session of the Congress in December, 1920, that Swaraj was added as an objective of Non-cooperation. The Congress resolved, in consequence, to boycott the Montagu Reforms and the elections under them. This decision precipitated a final and complete breach between the Congress and the Liberals.

Sastri had opposed Non-cooperation sponsored by the Mahatma on principle and more so for his reasons. He gave clear and final expression to his views in the *Citizen of*



Madras in its issue of May 15, 1920. Though the Mahatma had persuaded himself that the Khilafat was a just and great cause and called on his countrymen to win it under his banner or die, Sastri felt that on its religious aspect no non-Muslim had the right to hold an opinion of his own. The facts of history, however, had a significance which any student could appreciate. He was inclined to appreciate the secular loss to the Islamic peoples involved in the extinction of their last great kingdom rather than the outrage to their religious feelings. He attached weight to the breach of the promise made by the British Prime Minister that Turkey would not be dismembered:

"The main strength of their [Indian Muslims'] cause seems to rest on the pledge given by the Prime Minister of Great Britain, a pledge which is to be treated as idle breath because of the rich oil fields of Mosul and other temptations. . . . I agree with Mr. Gandhi in condemning the violation of Mr. Lloyd George's promise. But I do not agree with him in considering the people of India in any sense a party to the wrong. . . . We, in India, are not responsible at all, not even for the actions of the Government of India. And this Government stands clear and without blemish in this affair."

Sastri continued:

"I cannot, I confess, see the obligation resting on me to withdraw cooperation from a Government which has done right, in order to influence another Government which has done wrong, merely because the former is politically subordinate to the latter. The whole argument is fantastic to a degree."

Sastri was not convinced that Non-cooperation was not anti-Government. "Equally untenable and ingenious is the position that Non-cooperation is not anti-Government. An organised movement on the part of the subjects, to be executed in four stages, each more effective than the preceding, intended to embarrass at first and then utterly paralyse the machinery of government, until not that government but a superior government six thousand miles away is 'compelled' to give redress—is, if anything, but an abuse of language to say that such a tremendous upheaval is not anti-Government." Gandhi claimed that the movement was logical and

harmless. Sastri rejoined: "I cannot agree that it is logical, as I dispute the premises. As to its being harmless, I will readily grant that Mr. Gandhi wishes it to be so and will abandon it without compunction when it ceases to be so." He had grave doubts if the people most affected would respect his pacific injunctions when religious feelings are touched and roused to frenzy. "Mr. Gandhi may be justified in expecting strict compliance with his pacific commandments from those that have been in living contact with his personality in his *ashram* and assimilated its discipline. Is he not incurring grave risks and grave responsibilities when he expects the same compliance from casual *satyagrahis* who submit to his rule for a certain purpose under the stress of an overpowering emotion, who feel that in a way they are not obeying their own religion in submitting to that rule, and who will naturally give play to their own impulses the moment they become impatient?" Gandhi had expressed the view that "arm-chair" politicians had not appreciated the intensity of Muslim feeling, that inaction would certainly invite violence and that as long as people were under his control they would be out of harm's way. Sastri was not convinced: "I am not always rocking in an arm-chair and do not underrate Muslim feeling. But I cannot altogether suppress the thought which is daily growing to be a conviction, that Mr. Gandhi's advocacy has given the outraged feeling of the Muslim community a degree of strength, justification and authority which it would otherwise have lacked, and brought to its aid the active support of sections of non-Muslim communities. It is difficult now to speculate on what might have happened if Mr. Gandhi had not identified himself with the Khilafat movement. Many who wish to judge the situation fairly may believe that, without improving its final chances of success in international counsels, he has but added to its vogue, strength and potentialities for mischief. Of course, he has no such belief or intention; that goes without saying. Those who are of this way of thinking will not be ready to exonerate him from responsibility when he abandons the movement on account of its getting out of control, should it ever do so, which God forbid." Gandhi had said that Non-cooperation would be a test of the sincerity of Hindu friendship for Muslims. Sastri did not share that view: "The test is too hard, I call myself a friend of the Mussalman people.

I believe they have a very sore grievance. . . . I sympathise with them and am prepared to support their case in all reasonable ways. But I cannot support them in the policy of non-cooperation or in their threatened withdrawal of allegiance. They may say that my friendship and support are not of much value. But I claim that they are sincere." And he concluded: "My reading of history does not sustain the claim that they set up in its entirety. I do not believe in the efficacy of their methods and I apprehend serious danger from them. Lastly, the Koran has laid no commandments on me, and even the high authority of Mr. Gandhi fails to convert me to the theory that fellow-citizenship included an unrestricted obligation to suffer for a religion not one's own."<sup>1</sup> In appreciation of Sastri's stand the *Tribune* of Lahore said: "In these words Mr. Sastri sums up not only his personal attitude in this matter, but the general attitude of the bulk of the non-Muslim community in India."<sup>2</sup>

While the Non-cooperation movement was gaining ground, Sastri addressed numerous meetings all over the country against it. He attended the Madras Provincial Conference held in Tinnevely in June, 1920, and was among those who opposed Non-cooperation in connection with the Khilafat and lost. The name of Gandhi and the propaganda carried on in the press had already established the gospel of Non-cooperation so firmly that nothing for the moment could shake it. He regretted that the Tinnevely Conference sought to convert the Congress from a national organisation representing all shades of opinion into a party organisation by excluding the Liberals, who were more loyal to the traditions of the Congress than the Nationalists. He also regretted that the Conference decided that the new Reforms should be worked by Congress-Nationalists alone, though they had no faith in them and condemned them as "shadow of a shadow" and as humiliating to India. He also regretted that leaders should abandon their mission to lead and meekly follow their followers: "Public life would be poisoned at the fountain if leaders, after making a show of leading, took to following," and philosophised: "Leadership of democracy is something like happiness best attained when not sought directly and consciously."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, May 20, 1920, p. 186

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, May 27, 1920, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, July 8, 1920, p. 267.

Co-operation lost and Non-cooperation gained at this stage by the death on August 1, 1920, of Bal Gangadhar Tilak whom Gandhi had failed to win over to his policy. In his tribute to Tilak, Sastri said: "The death of Mr. Bal Gangadhar Tilak removes a great figure from Indian politics. For a quarter of a century and more, he had been the ideal of his followers and the dread of his opponents. Of Government he had been an unrelenting and consistent foe, except during his stay in England, during which he scandalised young Indians by his studied moderation of tone. . . . Clear-sighted and tenacious, he kept an eye on India's freedom and would not rest or let Government rest till it should be won."

Contrasting Tilak's attitude towards the Montford Reforms with that of Mahatma Gandhi, Sastri said: "He discountenanced the suicidal policy of rejecting the reforms and of abandoning the constitutional position gained. . . . Left to himself, he would never break the law openly and invite its rigours like Mr. Gandhi."

Sastri recorded that some English politicians of mark had, after an interview or two with Tilak, given him a place "among the greatest minds they had known." He concluded his tribute in these words: "None can deny that he had great qualities or that he played a great part. To found vernacular journalism, to lose and recover his fortune more than once, to dare the wrath of a Government and go to jail with the crown of a martyr, to write original books, to dominate political activity for a generation in a large part of the country and leave a numerous and well-knit party behind—these constitute an indefeasible title to the honour and loving recollection of his countrymen."

\* *Ibid.*, August 5, 1920, p. 316.

## *COUNCIL OF STATE, 1921*

WITH the sincere zeal which characterised him, Montagu took several steps which at the time were revolutionary innovations. Sir S. P. Sinha was made a member of the Imperial War Cabinet in 1918, a member of the House of Lords and appointed Under Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet to help Montagu in piloting his Bill in 1919, and appointed Governor of Bihar and Orissa in 1920. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was appointed Law Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Sastri was made a member of the committee to make rules under the Montagu Act, which were approved by the British Parliament in July, 1920. All was set for elections under the new Constitution.

Sastri and the Liberals were, however, greatly disappointed when the Special Session of the Indian National Congress, held in Calcutta in September, 1920, under the dominating influence of the Mahatma, resolved on Non-cooperation with the new Constitution and the boycott of the legislatures under it. In compliance with the resolution, some Nationalists, who had intended to contest the elections and even sweep the polls if only to keep the Liberals out, were terribly disappointed and were very wroth that the Liberals should have a free field! Sastri did not welcome the windfall to the Liberals. Instead, he made an earnest appeal in September, 1920, to the Nationalists to reconsider their decision, for their presence in the legislatures would make them more representative and more good could be got of the new Constitution if the Liberals and the Nationalists cooperated in working it.

"Believer as I am in the principles of the Moderate Party,

I am very strongly of the opinion that even that Party in the enjoyment of a monopoly of power cannot do full justice to themselves, to their principles or to the country unless they were kept continually up to the mark by vigilant and constant criticism from all parties in the state. . . I maintain that it is perfectly open to those who think as I have just now explained to go into the coming electoral contests and obtain those seats which they are perfectly entitled to by their numbers, by their authority and influence, and by the weight of their political thinking."<sup>1</sup>

His appeal was unheeded, with the result that only non-Congressmen, particularly the Liberals, stood for election and were elected. While the Congress was in session in Nagpur in the Christmas week of 1920, Sastri contributed an article to the *Indian Review* of Madras under the title "The Danger Ahead," in which he was critical of the Congress. "The general feeling was that it was not treating the Mahatma seriously first to pat him on the back, then, when it was clear he meant business, to say that the Congress should decide, and lastly, when the Congress decided in his favour, to turn round and call it a snatch vote and threaten to get it duly reversed in a few months. Nor do Mr. Gandhi's opponents seem to adopt direct tactics now." He thought that, notwithstanding the boycott by the Congress, the new legislatures contained a "responsible amount of public spirit, ability and character." He anticipated that if the duel within the Congress or the perversity of the Government did not give a fillip to it, Non-cooperation would soon become a negligible factor in Indian politics.

After attending the Liberal Federation, Sastri made a series of speeches against Non-cooperation and in favour of the best men in India working the new Constitution to make the most of it. But in many places, like Bombay and Poona, his meetings were disturbed by bands of non-cooperators and he was not allowed to finish his speeches, in spite of Mahatma Gandhi's strong disapproval of such tactics. Some Nationalist papers and speakers lightly passed over such incidents on the ground that "boys would be boys" and equally lightly suggested that people like Sastri should hold their meetings in private! There were, however, papers like the *Servant* of Calcutta which condemned such

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, October 7, 1920, p. 430.

acts of hooliganism and offered a public apology to Sastri and others of his kind. It said: "Although we differ most decisively from Mr. Sastri in political opinions, we have the highest respect for his scholarship and greatest admiration for his sturdy and determined work in the cause of the country. We are, therefore, convinced that anything Mr. Sastri has to say is always worth hearing, however subversive it may be of one's own ideas and beliefs."<sup>2</sup>

Sastri stood for election to the Council of State, the Upper Chamber. The Nationalists sought to deny Congress support for his candidature on the ground that he had not stood by the Amritsar Congress Resolution on the Reforms. The *Tribune* of Lahore commented:

"If a man like Mr. Sastri is not returned by a constituency which he honours by his candidature, it will be for no fault of Mr. Tilak's resolution [at the Bombay Provincial Conference], and certainly for no fault of his own, but will be due solely to crass stupidity on the part of that constituency, for Mr. Sastri adds this to his other magnificent accomplishments that his allegiance to the Congress is as much beyond question as that of Mr. Tilak or any other Congress leader of the first rank."<sup>3</sup>

Sastri was elected and took his seat on February 9, 1921, and was nominated as the first of the four Vice-Presidents of the Council.

It was in the background of Non-cooperation that the new Constitution was inaugurated in February, 1921. It had been proposed that His Royal Highness the then Prince of Wales should visit India for the purpose. But the idea was given up in view of the prevailing Non-cooperation atmosphere and the demand for the boycott of the Prince. At the Bombay Liberal Conference held in August, 1920, Sastri also had advised against the Prince's visit as he was not sure that he would be received in a manner befitting his position. It was subsequently decided that His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught should take the place of the Prince.

The Joint Session of the new Council of State and the Indian Legislative Assembly met for the first time on February 9, 1921. After the opening address of the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, the Duke read out the Message of His

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, February 20, 1921, p. 23.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, April 15, 1920, p. 122.

Imperial Majesty the King-Emperor. Both he and the Viceroy announced that the principle of autocracy in the governance of India had been abandoned and that henceforth India would bear her own burdens in an ever-increasing degree. After finishing his part in the official proceedings of the day, His Royal Highness, who knew India well, added a "few words of a personal nature," and appealed to Britishers and Indians to forgive and forget the Punjab tragedy and work together for the future.

There was a material change in the attitude of the Government of India, under the inspiration of Montagu. On the very first day of official business, the 14th of February, 1921, in the Indian Legislative Assembly, they admitted the Resolution of Mr. Jammadas Dwarakadas, a follower of Dr. Annie Besant, and subscribed to the declaration that the lives and honour of Indians were as sacred as those of Europeans and expressed regret for the excesses committed by officials during the martial-law régime.

On the same day, the 14th of February, 1921, in the Council of State, Government found time for Sastri's Resolution on repressive laws. Government supported his Resolution, which ran as follows:

"This Council recommends to the Governor-General in Council that a committee be appointed at an early date to examine the repressive laws now on the statute book, and report whether all or any of them should be repealed, and, in case where repeal is not desirable, whether the laws in question should be amended, and if so, how."

In moving the Resolution, Sastri asserted that if autocracy was abandoned, it was incongruous to let the repressive laws continue on the statute book. Anticipating the question whether, with Non-cooperation about, it was prudent to repeal such laws, Sastri maintained that the unrest derived a great part of its nourishment from the very existence of such laws themselves. Freedom was the antidote for unrest, not repression. He objected most to the Rowlatt Act, which he described as the "unblest mother of a monstrous brood of evil." Among others he mentioned the Deportation Regulations of 1818 to 1827, the Press Act, the Seditious Meetings Act, the Newspapers Incite-



ment to Offences Act and the Act relating to conspiracies. He admitted that all of them could not be repealed at once. But if conciliation be the keynote of the new dispensation, most of them must be repealed or amended.

In the course of his inaugural address, the Duke of Connaught had said:

"Political freedom has often been won by revolution, by tumult, by civil war, at the price of peace and public safety. How rarely has it been the free gift of one people to another in response to a growing wish for greater liberty and to a growing evidence of fitness for its enjoyment?"

In that message Sastri saw hope for India to achieve absolute equality with Great Britain herself by entirely peaceful and constitutional methods. Answering the question if any subject people had attained freedom through peaceful means, Sastri felt that India would achieve that unique feat. She should do so by "non-violent cooperation," rather than by non-cooperation, which beginning with non-violence, was likely to turn to violence because of the imperfections of human nature. He ended his speech with an appeal for cooperation.

"To this work of cooperation I invite the Government today by means of this Resolution. Let us, with His Royal Highness's words still ringing in our ears, on this first business day of the first Council, make this compact of high-hearted comradeship.

"One word more. In giving such liberties as may seem suitable, in taking such steps as may seem advisable, let there be no reservations as to the extent to which you wish to go. Go ahead bravely and not haltingly. It is the most essential condition of success in this great work. But us no buts; let there not be a superabundance of ifs. So working, we certainly will do what no other country in the world has done, achieve full constitutional liberty within the British Empire by entirely peaceful and constitutional means."<sup>1</sup>

Sir William Vincent, the Home Member, said that the Government of India recognised that there was a change in the administration and were anxious to act in the fullest degree up to the spirit of the Reforms and were desirous of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, February 24, 1921, p. 39.

allowing the legislature to exercise legitimate influence upon the Government, subject to their responsibility to Parliament. He drew pointed attention to the fact that in the former Legislature, Government had a majority and could accept or reject a resolution, but in the new Legislature, in which Government had no majority, the responsibility for acceptance or rejection rested on the Legislature, and all that the Government was competent to do was to support or oppose.

Some non-official members thought that Sastri's Resolution was much too mild and that there was no need for a committee to review the repressive laws, but that they should be repealed forthwith and moved an amendment to that effect. Sastri sympathised with it, but he feared that, in view of the special composition of the Council, it stood no chance of success. Prudence counselled the committee idea. His Resolution was finally carried.

On February 23, 1921, the Hon. Mr. Lallubhai Samaldas moved a Resolution in the Council of State praying that "the Government of India be granted full fiscal autonomy under the direction of the Indian Legislature." The spokesmen of the Government opposed it on the ground that the acceptance of "under the direction of the Indian Legislature" would eliminate the Secretary of State altogether, and that could not be done without amending the Government of India Act pretty drastically. They argued that fiscal autonomy was not possible without political autonomy, which was not contemplated by the Constitution, and offered to support the Resolution if the words "subject to the provisions of the Government of India Act" were substituted. Sastri upheld the constitutional difficulty of Government but pleaded for a convention by which the Secretary of State for India would voluntarily forego his power of initial consent and interim veto and let a fiscal measure prevail if the Government of India and the Indian Legislature were in agreement, as suggested by the Joint Select Committee of Parliament. He, therefore, supported the amendment suggested by Government, and it was carried.

On March 3, 1921, Sastri moved in the Council of State a long resolution to tighten the safeguards in the use of fire arms in dealing with riots and unlawful assemblies. Broadly speaking, he wanted that the Indian law on the subject should be brought into line with the English law,

that officials should be liable to legal action without the previous sanction of Government and that public enquiries should be instituted on demand after each firing. The Government spokesmen opposed most of the clauses of the Resolution on the ground that they were not to be found in the English law and that they would render the task of officers faced with riots practically impossible. In the course of his reply to the debate, Sastri paid a tribute to British jurisprudence, while regretting the Government's opposition to his Resolution, which sought "to place the Indian law on a footing with that magnificent system of English law under which it is our privilege to have come." All the clauses of the Resolution to which Sastri attached great importance, particularly the one which said that the previous sanction of Government was not necessary to institute criminal proceedings against illegal acts of officials, were negatived.

A resolution was moved by a non-official in the Council of State on March 9, 1921, recommending the complete separation of executive and judicial functions, a reform which the Indian National Congress had been demanding for several years. The feeling was widely held that the combination of these functions in the same official led occasionally to miscarriage of justice and the conviction of the innocent. The Government spokesmen admitted the proposition in principle, but opposed it as impracticable at the time. In any event, it was a provincial concern and would involve considerable expense, and it was not appropriate for the Government of India to invade the provincial sphere and impose financial burdens on the provinces, though they would raise no objection if the provinces undertook the reform and the expense. They also contended that the implication of miscarriage of justice was unfair to the magistrates, who were blamed whatever they did. A civilian of an earlier generation had thus described somewhat humorously the plight of the magistrate:

"Toil as he may, his guerdon is the same—  
The scantiest praise, the largest meed of blame,  
Acquit? And brave the Superintendent's curse?  
Convict? To see a dubious judge reverse?  
What tho' Assessors fail to find a flaw,  
And trust the judge alike for facts and law;  
Tho' link on link of evidence appear—

Proof piled on proof make clear and more clear  
 The prisoner's guilt—the bland High Court shines out  
 More skilled than Eldon in the art of doubt,  
 'Twixt right and wrong an even balance keeps,  
 The prisoner is released—and Justice weeps."<sup>5</sup>

The Government spokesman quoted a telegram from the Madras Government to the effect that a resolution for the separation of functions was defeated in the Madras Legislative Council. Sastri thought that it was inappropriate to discuss in the Central Legislature a subject which belonged to the provincial sphere and discounted the verdict of the Madras Legislature on the ground that it was motivated, as expressly stated in the Madras debate, by the prevailing anti-Brahmin feeling in Madras and by the fact that the Madras High Court contained some Brahmin judges.

As has been stated elsewhere, Sastri wished to move a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council on September 18, 1919, to discuss the happenings in the Punjab. The Viceroy, who was President of the Council, disallowed it. As a protest, Sastri declined to move the other resolutions of which he had given notice. Among them was one which advocated the abolition of racial privileges of Europeans in the criminal law of India, which Indians felt were very humiliating to them. The Resolution was resented by some Europeans! Speaking at the Liberal Federation during Christmas, 1920, in Madras, Sastri disclosed that great pressure was brought to bear on him to withdraw it, lest the Ilbert Bill agitation should be repeated. It may be recalled that in 1883, at the instance of the then Viceroy, Lord Ripon, Sir Courtney Ilbert framed a bill to abolish racial discriminations in the criminal law of India. It was fiercely opposed by the British community in India, every member of which, according to Mr. Seton Kerr, sometime Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, shared the conviction that "he belongs to a race whom God has destined to govern and subdue."<sup>6</sup> Lord Roberts had expressed the view: "It is this consciousness of the inherent superiority of the European which has won us India."<sup>7</sup> In consequence, the

<sup>5</sup> Council of State Debates, March 9, 1921, p. 446.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson and Garratt: *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, p. 536.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 537.

European community, with the aid or connivance of the military, made complete arrangements to apprehend the Viceroy, put him on a boat and deport him to England! If Sastri moved his Resolution there would be another Ilbert Bill agitation from the Europeans. With withering sarcasm, Sastri exclaimed: "It is that community which is now supposed to be teaching us the art of patience under suffering and of hopeful constitutional agitation till the end of the chapter." Sastri then related an incident which betrayed the racial arrogance of some Britishers: "I had a visit from a European friend in those anxious days. He came literally on a high horse and without sending in a card, he shouted my name. Duly I appeared before the noble visitor and took him inside my room. 'Look here,' he began, 'we are just now giving you a measure of self-government; we are going to trust you. Is this the reward that we get, viz., that you want these racial discriminations to be instantly abolished?' I gave him a suitable reply. The result was that in a couple of minutes the gentleman began to converse in a chastened mood. The kind of arguments he advanced is interesting." The first argument was that Indian judges were afraid of Europeans and would not convict a European offender. Sastri admitted that there was an element of truth in it, but he hoped that in the future, under Indian rule, Indian judges would be selected for their fearlessness of Europeans. The next argument was that Indian judges were ignorant of the ways of Europeans, and would not be able to render justice. Sastri twitted him by saying that European judges knew little of Indian ways and even took pride in their ignorance! Nevertheless, they were administering justice as between Indians. In any event, Indians knew more of European ways than Europeans knew of Indian ways. The final argument was that in the natural course of the political evolution of India, those discriminations would disappear, and it was not desirable to force the pace and create bad blood. Sastri dismissed all these ingenious arguments brought up to support a weak case: "The reality is that a European thinks that his prestige would suffer seriously if he lets himself be tried and convicted by an Indian. Time has come when the European can trust us to do him natural justice, and reliance need not be placed on exceptional cases." He recalled how, after prolonged negotiations, Japan had secured her judicial autonomy and the abolition

of foreign consular jurisdiction. Compared with the Japanese, the Indian system, asserted Sastri, was superior and on a level with the British, since it was modelled on the British, and even the Indian judges were trained under it. Indeed, the system in India at the time was so much British that Indians often complained against it! All the more reason why the special privileges of Europeans and Americans based on race should be abolished in India.

*IMPERIAL CONFERENCE, 1921*

DURING the decade 1921 to 1932, Sastri was often abroad on official and non-official missions in the interest mostly of the status of Indians overseas, an interest which he inherited from his Master, Gokhale, who had secured the stoppage of Indian indentured labour emigration in 1911 and had visited South Africa in 1912. During the decade Sastri visited Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Kenya, Fiji, Malaya and South Africa, besides Switzerland and America. During his earlier and first voyage to England in connection with the Montagu Reforms, he confided to a friend in a letter dated May 23, 1919, that his day-dreams included visits to America and Japan, on the one hand, and Fiji, Malaya, Ceylon among the British Colonies, and Australia and South Africa among the British Dominions, on the other. In the event he visited them all.

His second voyage to Britain was in 1921, as a member of the Ackworth Committee on Indian Railways. The Committee toured India for some months from December, 1920. Sastri accompanied it for some time, but in view of his other work, offered his resignation. He was, however, persuaded to continue his membership and attend whenever convenient to him. He left for England in April, 1921, to join the Committee there. He utilised his time in London to meet influential people and addressed several meetings regarding the political situation in India and, in particular, the Non-cooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. Because of his opposition to Non-cooperation, he was subjected to much heckling by Indian students. In September, 1921, he signed the Majority Report of the Ackworth Committee which recommended State manage-

ment of Indian Railways.

Before he left India in April, 1921, to join the Ackworth Committee, the Viceroy announced that Sastri was nominated a member of the Indian Delegation to the Imperial Conference due to be held in London in June, 1921. The leader was Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and the other member was His Highness the Maharao of Cutch. While Sastri's inclusion was well received in most quarters, some Nationalists, like Lala Lajpat Rai, and the Non-Brahmin leaders in Madras furiously attacked him and insinuated that he was after a big job like the Governorship of a Province!

The Imperial Conference began on June 20 and was presided over by the British Prime Minister, Mr. David Lloyd George, who in his opening speech made reference to the high ideals of the British Empire. In his first speech at the Conference on June 21, Sastri underlined the British Prime Minister's claims for the Empire and added that it was the peculiar good fortune of India to remain in it and work for the realisation of its noble ideals.

In making generous reference to the ideals of the Empire, Sastri gave expression to his own sincere convictions. At the same time, he pinned down the Conference to them as the justification for his Resolution on the status of Indians in the Dominions, of which he had given due notice. He next referred to the fact that, though India was accorded the same privileges in the Conference, her status was that of a Dependency and expressed the hope that she would soon attain the status of a Dominion. He then put in a chivalrous plea for generous treatment to Turkey, which had suffered defeat in the War. He then proceeded to refer to the status of Indians in the Dominions and the Resolution on the subject which would be regarded in India as the test of the Empire. It was of supreme importance that that subject should be considered and disposed of satisfactorily at once and a message of hope and good cheer conveyed to India. Full enjoyment of citizenship within the British Empire applied, not only in the United Kingdom, but in every self-governing Dominion within its compass. India had already agreed to a subtraction from its integrity by the compromise of 1918, which conceded that each Dominion should be free to regulate the composition of its population by suitable immigration laws. On that



compromise there was no intention whatever to go back, but he pleaded that there was no reason whatever to deny full rights of citizenship to Indians who were lawfully settled in the Dominions. It might seem to be of comparatively trifling importance to the other issues they had to consider. "We have great tasks. Let little things be got out of the way. I only wish that all our common energies should be bent towards realising more and more within the British Empire and extending further and further outside the British Empire those generous ideals of progress to which, Sir, you gave such inspiring and, if I may say so, such alluring expression yesterday."<sup>1</sup>

Sastri moved the following Resolution on July 7, 1921:

"This Conference, while reaffirming the Resolution of the Imperial War Conference of 1918 that each community of the British Commonwealth should enjoy complete control of the composition of its own population by means of restrictions on immigration from any of the other communities, recognises that there is an incongruity between the position of India as an equal member of the British Empire and the existence of disabilities upon British Indians lawfully domiciled in some other parts of the Empire. The Conference accordingly is of the opinion that in the interests of the solidarity of the British Commonwealth it is desirable that the rights of such Indians to citizenship should be recognised."

Though he had enough notice of it, Smuts asked for an adjournment of the debate to give him adequate time! The interval was used by Sastri and Montagu on the one side, and Smuts on the other, to canvass support for, and against, the Resolution respectively. Smuts insisted that he could not accept the Resolution on behalf of South Africa, but he did not wish to stand isolated. He was a great idealist in international affairs and had played a great part in drawing up the Charter of the League of Nations. He was, besides, one of the main pillars of the British Empire. He would look very small if in the Imperial Conference the white Prime Ministers of the white Dominions should desert him in favour of India which was non-white and a Dependency. He pleaded for white solidarity in the Empire and pressed the other members of the Conference to side

<sup>1</sup> Summary of Proceedings, Imperial Conference, 1921, p. 34.

with him and throw out the Resolution which, apart from its merits, was moved by an Indian and by one whom he declined to receive in South Africa in 1919 on a level with a white man. It would be a great humiliation to him to suffer defeat at the hands of Sastri. So he strove hard to get the Resolution defeated. Sastri, backed by Montagu, carried on equally strenuous propaganda for the Resolution. The argument that proved most effective with the Dominions was that they could afford to be righteous and honour the pledges of Queen Victoria and of successive British Governments that there shall be no racial discrimination in the British Empire. The number of Indians in the Dominions, other than South Africa, was very small, microscopically small. It was about 1,200 in Canada, mostly in British Columbia; about 2,000 in Australia; and about 600 in New Zealand. If Indians were given a double vote each, they were not likely to capture power in these Dominions or even tilt the fortunes of any white political party therein. There was no need for these Dominions to go out of the way to humiliate British subjects of Indian racial origin, lawfully settled in them, and weaken the solidarity of the Empire, particularly after the way India stood by it during the First World War. The propaganda of Smuts was apparently responsible for the fact that the Sastri Resolution gravitated to the bottom of each day's agenda and was not reached. Sastri and Montagu feared that it might not be reached at all during the session. Montagu, who was as keen about the Resolution as Sastri, wrote to the latter from his sick-bed on July 29, 1921, urging him to get a definite date for the Resolution before the Conference adjourned that week. "It is vital to us; I think you must insist that a day be appointed now."<sup>2</sup>

It was only when Sastri threatened on the advice of Montagu to quit the Conference that his Resolution was taken up.

The fortunes of the Resolution ebbed and flowed, as it were, with Smuts and Sastri pulling in opposite directions. The crux of the question was Empire solidarity *versus* white solidarity in the Empire. Ultimately, Sastri won the day, much to the discomfiture of Smuts, who made a reservation which ran as follows:

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 219.

"The representatives of South Africa regret their inability to accept this Resolution in view of the exceptional circumstances of the greater part of the Union."

To this Sastri added another reservation, which ran as follows:

"The representatives of India, while expressing their appreciation of the acceptance of the Resolution above, feel bound to place on record their profound concern at the position of Indians in South Africa, and their hope that by negotiation between the Governments of India and South Africa, some way can be found, as soon as may be, to reach a more satisfactory position."

In a private letter of July 10, 1921, from Chequers (the British Prime Minister's country seat) Sastri described the way his speech was received: "He [Sir Maurice Hankey] just now said that my speech on Friday in moving the resolution on the status of Indians was most eloquent. Hughes [Prime Minister of Australia] called it great. Meighen [Prime Minister of Canada] pronounced it moving. Balfour declared it very brilliant. The Prime Minister [Lloyd George] came up to me and said: 'It was a fine speech, careful and guarded, and therefore more effective.' Montagu says that he looks for happy results."<sup>3</sup>

Smuts was embarrassed. While Sastri was speaking, the Prime Minister and others were exchanging notes, mostly at the expense of Smuts: "'Did you observe,' he (Prime Minister) asked, 'the by-play that was going on all the time you were speaking and the notes that went amongst us?' 'No,' I said (not altogether truthfully, for Montagu had told me confidentially) and Dr. (Nicholas Murray) Butler was curious to know what it was. The P.M. said that my speech gladdened the hearts of the British Cabinet Ministers, for I arraigned General Smuts, who used on every occasion to preach the Sermon on the Mount with a sanctimonious air. They are very sore about it and told each other: 'Serve him right. Where is his justice now and equality and tenderness to oppressed nationalities?' Hughes remarked that he was very angry with Lloyd George for postponing the discussion, for he was eager to declare on my side and down Smuts."<sup>4</sup> Sastri published in 1925 some of

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

Montagu's notes to him at the Imperial Conference, which showed how completely he had identified himself with India and seized every opportunity to secure equality of status for India with the Dominions, and habitually used the first person plural, "We," when he referred to India. Montagu paid a high tribute to Sastri in a "private" letter of March 8, 1922:

"In reflecting upon our conversation before you left London, I feel that I did not fully convey to you my sense of appreciation of your services to your country and the Empire whilst you were here. You have not only acquired for India a new appreciation in the councils of the world but I think that you will carry back with you true appreciation of the fact that I wish your countrymen would learn that hate begets bitterness, that the English want to serve India and that a real and dignified cooperation does not mean abandonment, or even the postponing, but rather the acceleration of nationalist aspirations, and must meet—and does meet—with response from my fellow countrymen. I have to thank you for much help and feel grateful for much sympathy. I think you realise the difficulties of my task, and the assistance that you have rendered me has been much appreciated by me and will reinforce me in my work. The best luck attend you in the life that you have dedicated to the service of your country and the Empire."

The Sastri Resolution made history in the Imperial Conference. It was the first time that the rule of unanimity of Conference resolutions was broken in favour of a majority vote. India, which was but a subordinate and non-white branch of the British Government, carried a resolution in the Imperial Conference, the other members of which were Prime Ministers of White Dominions, and isolated South Africa, led by Smuts, an Imperial and international statesman of the first order. Smuts never forgave Sastri. Further, it was suggested for the first time that India and South Africa should negotiate directly. This suggestion was realised subsequently when the first Round Table Conference between the two Governments was held in Cape Town in 1926.

Regarding Smuts's attitude, Sastri revealed subsequently: "It was quite open to General Smuts to take his stand on the understanding that no resolution should be passed

which was not unanimous and he could, therefore, well have said at the time, 'as I am not a consenting party to this resolution, I will not allow you to pass it.' But, far from taking that position, which he was entitled to take, General Smuts was so impressed with the Indian case, with the difficulties which the Empire was experiencing in holding together, that he actually said; 'Although it is not possible for me to join, my sympathy is with Mr. Sastri; let the Resolution pass; I do not mind it, provided it does not bind me.'<sup>5</sup>

Smuts accepted the principle of equal citizenship in the Empire as a whole and made a reservation only with respect to South Africa. But at the next Imperial Conference in 1923, he denied equal citizenship, not only in South Africa, but in the whole Empire. He said:

"There is no equality of British citizenship throughout the Empire. . . . The common Kingship is the binding link between the parts of the Empire; it is not the source from which private citizens will derive their rights. They will derive their rights simply and solely from the authority of the State in which they live. . . . The conception of the Empire as a League of Nations ought to do away with these claims, which are disturbing and unsettling in the Empire."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, Smuts categorically denied the concept of "one Sovereign, one Empire and one Citizenship" which India long cherished. But the real question was not whether there was a constitutional imperative of equal rights but whether it was politically desirable to grant them to strengthen the solidarity of the Empire.

Sastri was criticised by some Indian critics for his enthusiasm for the British Empire just when Mahatma Gandhi had launched his Non-cooperation movement against the "satanic" British Government in India. Sastri, however, did not share the Mahatma's view and had publicly opposed it. He was a critic, severe and uncompromising, of certain aspects of British administration in India, but he had genuine faith in and love for the ideals of the Empire. He could not plead for equal rights for Indians in the Empire at the Imperial Conference in London and at the same time denounce the Empire as "satanic." Montagu,

<sup>5</sup> V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, *The Kenya Problem*, p. 91.    <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

who completely identified himself with India, passed on a hint to Sastri just before the latter spoke on his Resolution in which he said: "I hope you will not forget that the best way to ensuring support from Mr. Meighen, Mr. Massey, etc., is to emphasise the loyalty which I know you feel to the Empire and citizenship. I hear people are making the most of attempts to persuade Empire that India is less loyal to the common purpose than the others."<sup>7</sup> As the representative of the Government of India, Sastri could not have taken a different line. In his case, there was no conflict between his own views and the instructions of the Government of India.

Sastri was also criticised for not claiming the right to free emigration in the Empire. It may be recalled, however, that Gokhale and Gandhi, whose patriotism was never in question, had already surrendered that right in 1914; and Lord Sinha had confirmed the surrender in 1918. It was not practical politics for Sastri in 1921 to ask for a reversal of it. Even Independent India has not up to now been able to ask for or obtain the right of free movement within the Commonwealth.

While in 1914, Mahatma Gandhi surrendered not only the right to free immigration into South Africa but also the political rights of Indians in that country, Sastri in 1921 sought to secure political rights for Indians in the whole Empire, including South Africa.

While he was in London for the Imperial Conference Sastri was made a member of the Privy Council of His Majesty the King-Emperor. He was also honoured with the Freedom of the City of London. In the course of his laudatory speech the Lord Mayor wished that Sastri's influence would grow among Indians. With a somewhat reminiscent and sad smile hovering on his lips, Sastri prefaced his reply by the humorous remark that there was much scope for it. He then made a most eloquent and solemn plea for the extension to India of the freedom which Britain had achieved. The speech evoked repeated and prolonged cheers from the distinguished audience.

"I am keenly sensible of the great honour I have just received at the hands of the Corporation of London. In the few well chosen words with which I was introduced the wish was

<sup>7</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 58.

expressed that my influence and popularity amongst my countrymen may increase. I feel profoundly grateful for that wish and hope that it may be fulfilled, for if I am sure of nothing else I am sure of this that there is very great scope indeed for improvement in that direction. (Laughter.) I accept the Freedom of the City of London not as a personal distinction but in all sincerity and hopefulness as a symbol and prelude to the conferment on India of the freedom of the British Empire. On the highest authority the British Empire has been declared to be without distinction of any kind. Neither race nor colour nor religion is to divide man from man so long as they are subjects of this Empire. As in the great temple of Jagannath in my country, where the Brahmin and the outcaste, the priest and the pariah, alike join in a common devotion and worship, so in this British Empire, which, by your leave, I will call the greatest Temple of Freedom on this planet, he blasphemes and violates her freedom who raises barriers of one kind or another, or says to his fellow worshippers—'there shalt thou abide, come not near me.'

"The joys of freedom are indeed difficult to describe; they can only be fully appreciated by those who have had the misfortune to lose them for a time. With grief and sorrow I occasionally notice that here and there are people who speak of freedom as though it were a mechanical invention, or the quack specific for which they have taken up a patent. 'Our ancestors,' say they, 'have fought, have struggled, have sacrificed and have suffered for freedom. It is ours exclusively. We will not share it with those who have not shared our antecedent troubles, trials and misfortunes to attain it. Come, take it if you can, but give it we will not.' I take it that that is not an exalted view of freedom. Humanity would be but a poor witness to the wisdom of the All-Wise if the experience through which it has gone were to yield benefit only to those who have gone through it. History would be a dead thing, all our trials and misfortunes would be superfluous, if we compelled posterity, in its turn, to go through similar ordeals. What a man has fought for and won he must without reserve or qualification share with his fellowmen. Sanitarians preach that you can never enjoy the best health in your house till your surroundings are also well developed in the matter of hygiene. Philosophers tell us that you can best seek your own happiness only by serving for the happiness of others. So I believe no man will enjoy to the fullest measure the blessings of freedom unless he shares them to the full with his fellowmen.

"Like culture, like knowledge, like virtue and like spiritual merit, freedom is a thing which, the more it is given the more it grows. He who would circumscribe freedom to particular areas and to certain peoples knows not what he is doing, for he is taking away from humanity a possible contribution to its richness and glory, a contribution which I take it to be the will of Providence that every race, every people should make in its own good time.

"So, Ladies and Gentlemen, if you have come into this great heritage of freedom, representative institutions, Parliamentary Government and every form of human equality which civilizations have evolved, be not like the miser who keepeth his goods to himself but gets no benefits from them, only evoking the envy and hatred of the neighbourhood and, alas, even of his own family. Rather let it be said of you that you kept not the best for yourselves and your children and grandchildren unto remote generations. Rather let this be said of your country in regard to India: 'England took charge of a people divided from her by colour, by race and by culture. She fitted them for the tasks of Empire, and, when the time was ripe, she gladly admitted them to be full and equal partners in the glory of Empire and the service of humanity'."



## GENEVA AND WASHINGTON

**EVEN** as India, though a British Dependency, was accorded the status of a Dominion at the Imperial Conference, so also she was accepted as an original member of the League of Nations, thanks largely to the extraordinary zeal of Montagu for the *de facto* advancement of India's status in anticipation of the *de jure*. Sastri was included in India's Delegation to the session of the League in Geneva in September, 1921. He made a great speech at the League. Writing in *Outward Bound*, H. Wilson Harris, then President of the International Association of Journalists, accredited to the League, described the occasion:

"It was not Mr. Sastri the ascetic or Mr. Sastri the official delegate of Delhi that the Geneva Assembly acclaimed. Till he mounted the tribune in the second week of the Assembly the white turban poised above the dark, calm, Eastern countenance alone marked him out for notice. From that day onward his name was on the lips of every delegate whoever discussed with another the eminently debatable question of who was the foremost orator of the Assembly. Was it Sastri? If he could seem so, that was almost enough to establish the claim. . . . After waiting in patience for his opportunity he was called on as the concluding speaker in a weary discussion that had already dragged on for too long. The hour was late. The hall was slowly emptying. Between the beginning of Mr. Sastri's speech and its end it emptied no more. The slow sentences with their faultless phrasing compelled attention. Here was a new voice, the expression of the conclusions of a new mind playing on the League."<sup>1</sup>

"We, I dare to say," said Sastri, "are the authentic voice

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, April 20, 1922, p. 142.

by means of which the conscience of the world will speak." Harris commented: "It will be hard for the League to find a higher watchword."

In the course of his speech Sastri said:

"I confess I have been moved to my utmost depths by what I have seen and heard. Hard and cold, indeed, must be the heart that fails to be touched, and touched to noble issues, by a spectacle such as this. The nations of the world foregather from the ends of our continents, representing many shades of colour, many varieties of political and social thought, and many states and grades of culture and advance in all directions—people small and great, weak and strong, but all alike weary of the mistaken past, eager for a better day for mankind, and resolved, with bruised and bleeding hearts, to stand by higher ideals for humankind."

He would ignore the criticisms of people who stood outside and refused to share responsibility for the work of the League, and defended the somewhat cautious approach of the League to difficult questions. The League was breaking entirely new ground. Those who snatch before time often fail of their grasp and come to grief. Concerning the duty of the members of the Assembly, he said: "I think that our supreme duty lies in believing... that we are not here to further the interests of the countries which we may happen immediately to represent, but we must constantly bear in mind that we are, each and every one of us, bound to act in the interests of all the others... that we are citizens of the world... We must resolutely refuse to be bought by any bribe, whether of political privileges or of trade facilities. We must not be daunted by fears of aggression by powerful neighbours, and we must, without haste and without rest, proceed in the daily work here, to speak and to vote in obedience solely to our conscience and our sense of duty." Sastri pleaded for disarmament in the interests of the world. India would welcome it because, "although the quarrel was not ours, we willingly and gladly came into the War with our own little bit."

He recounted with pride and satisfaction that India, almost alone amongst the industrial countries, had ratified and implemented the Resolutions of the Washington Conference on Labour. Though few other countries equalled

India in this respect, she was not given a place in the Board of the International Labour Conference; she was ignored. Similarly, India was ranked high when she was taxed for the expenses of the League, but was ranked very low in the representation of Indians in the Secretariat of the League; she had but one single representative, while America, which was not a member of the League, had thirteen! "I do not ask for an increase in our representation as any reward for our virtue; but I offer this suggestion to the League with every confidence that our men, taken from the disciplined ranks of our public services, will be found not inferior to any in the world with whom they may be brought into competition either for efficiency or for industry or for devotion to the work."<sup>2</sup>

Sastri then referred to the C. Mandates which were entrusted to certain powers to be governed "under their laws" as integral parts of their territories. Though nothing had yet happened to occasion a complaint, he wished to take time by the forelock and remind the Mandatory Powers that mandates were a "sacred trust of civilization" and should be governed in accordance with the Charter of the League which did not countenance racial discrimination. Germany had not introduced the colour bar in her colony of Tanganyika, and he hoped that neither Japan nor India would have occasion to tell the League that non-Europeans were worse off under the trusteeship of the League than under the Germans. He feared that South Africa might extend the colour bar to her mandated territory.

Sastri's speech was enthusiastically acclaimed by such competent critics as Lord Balfour, Lord Robert Cecil and H. A. L. Fisher, among others. Balfour told Sastri that after he had heard the latter's speech, he realised the heights to which the English language could rise.

South Africa's attitude towards coloured people was strikingly illustrated by an incident that happened at the League when it discussed the principle to be applied to determine the financial contribution which each of the member-nations might be asked to make to the League. One alternative that was considered was that each country should contribute in proportion to its population. When his turn came, the representative of South Africa named about two million as the population of his country. When a sur-

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, October 6, 1921, p. 427.

prised colleague cross-examined him, as it were, he admitted that, if the non-whites in South Africa were also counted, the population of South Africa was about seven millions! It did not occur to him to do so in the first instance; he was conscious only of the white population, and not the non-whites!

Sastri represented India on the Opium Committee of the League and defended the opium policy of the Government of India against criticism, particularly of the American representatives. As a matter of fact, India's policy was more enlightened than that of her critics. Criticism in India was largely inspired by the prevailing spirit of Non-cooperation which considered it highly patriotic to attack the Liberals as well as the Government of India, irrespective of merits.

Sastri was somewhat surprised that the Japanese Delegation to the League was phenomenally large. Its leader explained to Sastri that it was not exhibitionism or extravagance but solid investment. If the delegation was small and its personnel was changed every year, its members would enter on their duties as novices, diffident and hesitant; but if it was large and many of the members had attended several sessions of the League, Japan could vary the personnel every year and yet choose veterans, familiar and confident and as if to the manner born.

On his return to London from Geneva, Sastri came to know that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales was due to visit India. As already noted, the Prince was to have inaugurated the new Constitution in early 1921, but in view of the then political situation in India, he was advised to abandon it, and his place was taken by His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught. The new Viceroy of India, Lord Reading, pressed the Prince to visit India and assured him of a cordial welcome, perhaps because he felt that the inauguration of the new Constitution had created an atmosphere favourable to the visit and also perhaps because the cancellation of the earlier visit was taken as an affront to British prestige, which called for a rebuttal. Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian Nationalists suspected that the motive of the visit was to challenge their influence and bolster up the badly-shaken British prestige. So, they proclaimed a boycott of the Prince's visit, without meaning any personal disrespect to him. Sastri had misgivings about the appropriateness of the visit at the time and shared them with

Their Majesties. But when the decision was taken, he thought it unwise to boycott the visit as it would infuriate British sentiment and alienate British friends of India. He therefore wrote a letter to *The Times*, London, to that effect. His plea did not endear him to his nationalist critics.

When the Limitation of Armaments Conference was to be held in Washington, D.C., U.S.A., in November, 1921, Sastri suggested to Montagu that he, as Secretary of State for India, should be allowed to hold a watching brief, if not a place at the Conference. Montagu replied that "we" must have a place at it. Finally, India was found a place, and Sastri was made the leader of the Indian Delegation. While Canada was invited separately, South Africa was included in the British Delegation, much to the annoyance of Smuts who had suffered a defeat at the hands of India at the Imperial Conference, London. Sastri was quick to emphasise the significance of India's presence at the Washington Conference. In a letter to *The Times*, London, he asserted that India enjoyed Dominion Status in imperial and international affairs. He advocated and hoped that India would attain Dominion Status in internal affairs also by the development of informal conventions, without waiting for formal instruments.

During his stay in Washington for the Armaments Conference, Sastri had an opportunity—perhaps the first for an Indian statesman—to address a large audience, composed of many members of both Houses of the American Congress, on the situation in India. He said that it was pretty desperate though not hopeless. The Government of India suffered from complete isolation and had adopted repressive measures against Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation, which proved a great blunder. Rapid advance towards Dominion Status by constitutional means, as advocated by the Indian Liberals, was the only way to save the deplorable situation from tending towards complete anarchy.

Mr. Elmer Davis paid a tribute to Sastri in the *New York Times*:

"There is another British Delegate who has made an excellent impression on his few public appearances: a man unknown to America before this Conference but who may be heard in future, Srinivasa Sastri of India. He has spoken for India twice, and those who predicted that he would present a purely official

view, still more a purely British official view, have been badly mistaken. That he wants Indian self-government he does not conceal, nor that he takes the Indian national culture and character and Hindu religion seriously. But when he talks of Indian aspirations he talks as a sane man who knows that everything cannot be done in a day, and that it is much easier to tear down something fairly good than to build something a little better. A good upstanding man, this Sastri, in the opinion of those who have heard him here. Incidentally, he speaks English a shade better, if anything, than any other member of the British Delegation, or the American, for that matter."

Sastri's work at Geneva and Washington received high praise from other competent critics also. When, on March 3, 1922, he gave a dinner in London in honour of Lord Lytton, who was proceeding to India as Governor of Bengal, Mr. H.A.L. Fisher took the occasion to pay tribute to Sastri's work in Geneva. He said:

"I doubt whether the career of any Indian in the long annals of Anglo-Indian history has been marked by such richness and variety of experience as that of Mr. Sastri. It was my privilege last September to be one of the delegates representing His Majesty's Government at the Assembly of the League of Nations at Geneva, and it is no flattery or exaggeration to say that the great sensation of that meeting was furnished by the eloquence of our host. . . . I consider that our host both by his eloquence and the impression his integrity and character has made has greatly spread the reputation of Great Britain all over the world. Not only did he worthily represent British India at Geneva but he was also at the Washington Conference, and there again he made the same impression of firmness of character and elevation of view. . . . He stands for sane, reasonable and moderate policy."<sup>3</sup>

## SELF-DETERMINATION

SASTRI returned to London from America in February, 1922, and was dismayed to find that the political atmosphere in England towards India had turned adverse. His Imperial Conference Resolution of racial equality for Indians in the Dominions, except South Africa, had been rejected for the Crown Colony of Kenya by Churchill, the Colonial Secretary, though he was a party to the Resolution and the Government of India had publicly assured that the Resolution, and not the exception, applied to Crown Colonies directly administered by Britain. Montagu publicly repudiated Churchill's interpretation and the Tories were pressing him to resign from the Cabinet. In an interview to *The Times*, London, Sastri bore eloquent testimony to the great service rendered by Montagu, but *The Times* did not scruple to omit it. In the published part of the interview Sastri pointed out that Churchill's policy was fraught with the utmost danger to India and Britain. The good faith of Britain would be irremediably shaken and the party in India which stood for the British connection would be wiped out of existence. It was the greatest unwisdom to teach India at the time that she must use force or threaten it, not for the purpose of obtaining rights but even for the fulfilment of pledges repeatedly made and solemnly endorsed by the Imperial Conference. The Non-cooperation movement in India had alienated an increasing number of British people who were earlier friendly towards India. *The Times* said that it was not so much the Tories in England as Mahatma Gandhi and his Non-cooperation that were responsible for driving Montagu out of office! Soon after, Montagu was compelled to resign on the ostensible

ground that the publication of a memorandum advocating a revision of the Treaty of Sevres with Turkey as demanded by the Muslims in India, was a breach of Cabinet discipline.

Mahatma Gandhi was arrested on March 10, 1922, and was convicted and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Nobody was more distressed by these events than Sastri. He returned to India in March, 1922, and gave a series of lectures at receptions, dinners and public meetings explaining the purpose and justification of his missions to London, Geneva and Washington and his forthcoming visits to Australia, New Zealand and Canada, as well as his appreciation of the political situation in England concerning India. In his speech at the Deccan Sabha, the premier Liberal institution in Poona, on April 1, 1922, he insisted that India should be represented in imperial and international gatherings since their work affected her also, and she should share their responsibilities and sustain her own credit. For every single person who then questioned the justification for India's inclusion at such gatherings, twenty would question more vehemently if she had been excluded therefrom. Though India had not yet attained Dominion Status, she was well on her way to that goal. But that did not mean relaxing the agitation for further political advance at home. On the contrary, it was all the more reason for sustained pressure in spite of difficulties in the way. For advance by constitutional means India had to have the goodwill of Britain. The boycott of the Prince of Wales and the Non-cooperation movement did not help to retain or promote such goodwill, but would only deepen the suspicion that, if given Dominion Status, India would break with Britain and the Empire. It was necessary to dissipate such suspicions in Britain and the Dominions, and for that purpose missions by prominent Indians were necessary.

April, 1922, marked a profound change in Sastri's ideas for constitutional advance of India. In an article he contributed to the *New India* of Madras, he accepted for the first time the concept of Self-Determination for India, a great advance in his political thought. President Woodrow Wilson had contributed it to the political philosophy of the world in 1918. Dr. Annie Besant had advocated it for India soon after. But it did not appeal to Sastri for India at the time. Even in 1922, he felt that Self-Determination as en-



visaged by Wilson was not applicable to India. He was, however, willing that, subject to the final sanction of the British Parliament, a Convention of elected legislators under the existing Constitution might draw up a constitution for India and submit it to the British Parliament for sanction, as it would be more or less a natural consummation of the present Constitution. If, by chance, any eminent men were excluded from the new legislatures, they might be co-opted by the Convention or requested to attend as advisers. But the principal point was that the scheme should embody the best wisdom in the land and be the work of the duly elected legislatures. There was no need to expect that the Government of India would oppose or discountenance the project. A deputation proceeding to England with a scheme of that kind, which perhaps had likewise been submitted to the Central Legislature and blessed by it, would have every chance of being received with respectful attention in the Imperial Parliament. It could then be claimed for the Constitution that in a sense it was the result of Self-Determination. It was difficult to conceive of Self-Determination in any other sense as applicable to India.

Dr. Besant had advocated a type of Democracy for India which would start without the defects which Lord Bryce regretted in the British system. She would have adult franchise in the villages and prescribe qualifications of an ascending degree, based on property, education and previous public service for the affairs of the taluq, the district, the province and, finally, the Centre. Sastri admitted that this system of graduated democracy attracted him, as it did others. But with his "incurable habit of seeing the other side to an argument," he pointed out that the Besant Democracy would be a graduated Oligarchy and not Democracy. Further, policies at the Centre affected the people in the villages who were presumed to have a core of common-sense to understand their implications. The understanding would grow with the growth of popular education. "Our interests lie all over, and what we can be made to understand we should be allowed to regulate." Any departure from the British system would be exploited by the opponents of India's constitutional advancement as a confession that India was unfit for democracy. The average statesman in England had a superstitious veneration for his own parti-

cular constitution. He had been strengthened in his veneration by its imitation by many Continental countries. Those who essayed the building up of a new policy for India could not afford to forget that, for better or worse, she was wedded to British policy. Her youth for generations had been nourished on British ideals of individual freedom, ordered progress and universal suffrage as the ultimate goal of Democracy. They had been approved and sanctified by a succession of authoritative pronouncements and embodied in Royal promises of Swaraj and the Preamble to the Act of 1919. In that direction clearly lay India's progress. It was extension, not contraction of suffrage, that constituted the essence of progress; not the erection of specialised qualifications but their disappearance; not privileges or responsibilities for the few but an increasing approximation to the ideal of equal privilege and responsibility for all, typified by the cry of one man one vote.

It is noteworthy that a few years earlier Sastri had defended the system of irremovable executive as embodied in the Congress-League Scheme and was critical of the system of Responsible Government as it obtained in England. But in 1922, he veered round and preferred the latter to the former.

Sastri presided over the First Provincial Liberal Conference in Bombay on May 7, 1922, and delivered his address extempore. At the outset he drew up a balance sheet of the Non-cooperation movement. It was led by Mahatma Gandhi "whose character is above cavil and whose motives were beyond suspicion." It lent its high prestige and popularity to great social causes like the Removal of Untouchability, Prohibition and Swadeshi. It had carried the movement to the remotest corners of the country. It had evoked unprecedented patriotic sense among the people. He then referred to the debit side and did so in sorrow rather than in anger. It had caused much destruction of property and the imprisonment of over twenty thousand people; it widened the gulf between the Hindu and the Muslim; it provoked the Government to resort to highly repressive measures. It had enormously increased the slave mentality of the people. It had manifested on an unprecedented scale the disparity between precept and practice. It had been the indirect occasion for manifesting to the world how some Indians, when excited by angry passions, could be guilty of

acts of cruelty and barbarity, scarcely compatible with the character for spirituality which they wished to establish amongst the nations of the world. Then it had spread the spirit of revolt and undermined the foundations, which wise people were careful to instil and foster, of obedience to law and order. Above all, his complaint against the movement was that, starting with the idea of undeniable grievances from which the people suffered and for which the Government was responsible, professing to hit the Government and save the people, it had throughout and every time hit the people more and more.

He asserted that the best way to cure sedition was for Government to remove the cause betimes with understanding and sympathy. He regretted the loss of faith in the British Government.

"I have never known such profound distrust of Government as there is today, such absolute lack of faith in their sincerity, such rooted tendency to put aside all their pledges and promises and declarations of intentions as of no value whatever."

He pleaded that the Government of India should interpret the Government of India Act, 1919, liberally and progressively and generously, release political prisoners and recover public confidence and remove the cause of Non-cooperation. He advocated the abolition of Diarchy in the provinces and the abandonment of periodic examination of India's fitness for self-government. He discounted the proposal that England should, of her own accord, grant immediate provincial autonomy if only because there was no British statesman divine enough to do so and secure the sanction of the British Cabinet and Parliament. He also discounted the proposal for action independent of the existing Constitution. He repeated and elaborated his earlier idea of a convention of legislators duly elected under the current Constitution to frame a Constitution and submit it to the British Parliament. Experience had already demonstrated that the Provincial Governments worked best when Diarchy was ignored rather than when it was taken seriously.

Sastri changed his mind regarding Diarchy in the Central Government; he was no more in favour of it. Experience had shown that the Viceroy had used his extraordinary

powers in the day-to-day administration which were not meant to be used even under provocation. Instead, he sought to extend by convention the power of the Legislature over the whole range of functions. Under Diarchy in the Centre, the Legislature would be supreme in a few "transferred" subjects, impotent in the other "reserved" subjects. As it was, though in law the Central Government was not responsible to the Central Legislature in any department of public administration, in practice it behaved in the days of Montagu as if it was responsible in all departments. It was a gain and not a loss.

In order to achieve India's goal, Sastri advocated the Liberal policy of pushing along the path of least resistance. There are no angels under the sun, he declared, whether in India or in England. But all had moments when they behaved like angels. He humorously remarked: "Parliament, perhaps in the preamble and the provisions of its Acts, employs language calculated to produce the impression that Englishmen are from breakfast to dinner nothing but angels." Then he added: "They answer to a high impulse, which comes to them in rare moments. Well it were for them and for India if such moments were more frequent and formed one golden chain unbroken. By patience, by employing every argument that experience and wisdom could urge, by continually appealing to their higher nature, India could make these moments more frequent and more continuous and, therefore, more benevolently operative for the general benefit of the human race. He thought it was not impossible for the Liberals to undertake such a task. The Non-cooperator said that he would convert the tyrant first into a commiserator, then into a penitent and then into an ameliorator and finally into a loving brother. What was open to the Non-cooperator was also open to the Liberals.

The Viceroy, Lord Reading, gave a banquet in honour of Sastri in Simla on May 12, 1922, on the eve of his tour to the British Dominions. Responding to the toast, Sastri referred not only to the British Commonwealth and his impending tour, but also to the internal situation in India at the time. Referring to the Commonwealth, he said that somehow or other he had an unquenchable faith in its future. He had been criticised every now and then for referring in an excess of enthusiasm to its ideals. But still he remained impenitent. He belonged to the Servants of India

Society, of which the basic article was the belief that the connection of India with England was somehow intended to fulfil some high purposes for the benefit of the world. Belonging to that Society, he had never wavered in that faith.

While recognising that no human institution was perfect and while not being blind to the evil aspect of British Imperialism, Sastri preferred to focus attention on its benevolent aspect and to appeal to its instruments to live up to it. Surveying the high officials from the Viceroy downwards to Under-Secretaries assembled at the banquet, he asked them to remember that if the Britannic Commonwealth had a high mission and a noble destiny, they could not be fulfilled except through its agents and that on each one of them devolved a part of that responsibility. Then, with a bluntness that was unusual for him, he pointed to the people's loss of faith in the Government. "We never have seen in the country such a wreck of hope and faith in the Government of the day. I say this in all solemnity." Having shocked his British audience, he admonished them. "It rests with you to rebuild this hope by constantly remembering...that you are, each one individually, the chosen vehicle of the great spirit of benevolence that has always ennobled the British Government in its mission in the world."<sup>1</sup>

While some of the Britishers were hurt by his reference to the wreck of faith, some Indians were hurt by his panegyric of the British Commonwealth. He had to pay the penalty for his cross-bench mind!

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, May 18, 1922, p. 191.

## DOMINION TOUR

WHEN the Sastri Resolution was finally passed in 1921 by the Imperial Conference with the single dissent of South Africa, the Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia and New Zealand told Sastri that it was comparatively easy for them to pass it in the cosmopolitan metropolis of the Empire but it was quite a difficult proposition for them to get it implemented in their Dominions in view of local prejudices and party politics. They, therefore, invited him to visit their Dominions, plead the cause of Indians therein and create public opinion favourable to the Resolution and offered to give him all facilities for his mission. He told them that it was a strange suggestion. Once they accepted the Resolution, it was their task to get it accepted by their parliaments and electorates. But they insisted that Sastri should undertake the task. Montagu strongly advised him to accept the invitations and do his best. Smuts alone was against it; he made it clear that in any event Sastri should not visit South Africa.

Sastri's acceptance of the invitation was criticised by some Indians with the taunt that he was a mere valet of British Imperialism. But the general opinion was that he was the best available Indian to undertake the important and even urgent mission. Sastri shared the view. In a private letter of March 13, 1922, he said: "I own my desire to go abroad is selfish. It brings me new excitement, fresh knowledge, added vogue, enhanced importance. Are these mean ends? But the true answer is, my desire to go abroad is not wholly or even mainly selfish. I am committed to it in the proper course of public business. It is in the discharge of a public duty. It is demanded by considerations of India's

good. Honestly, I do not see, among available men, any other who can be entrusted with the mission of educating opinion in the Dominions in our favour. And I maintain that this mission cannot be delayed. Its reaction, if properly guided, on India's advance, is considerable."<sup>1</sup> He acknowledged that his competence for the mission was in some measure due to the fact that he represented the Government of India. He said in the same letter: "That the Government of India is behind this mission is its strength; its nature makes it indispensable. No one can treat with the Ministers and legislatures of the Dominions who has not the countenance of the Government of India. My having sustained a similar capacity on three former occasions has given me a prestige which few others command and which would be exceedingly useful in the present enterprise."

Sastri visited Australia, New Zealand and Canada in 1922, with the primary object of inducing their Governments, legislatures and electorates to implement his Resolution of 1921 and incidentally to enquire into any disabilities and grievances the local Indians had, and to promote better understanding between India and the Dominions. He was received right royally in the Dominions and given facilities to meet leading people and to address Cabinets and legislatures and public meetings. In an intimate letter, he thus described his reception in Australia: "They treated me very well in Australia. Everywhere the best hotel, special carriages on railways (either the Prince of Wales's or the Governor-General's); Ministers to escort and look after me; grand banquets and receptions; crowded meetings; giddy applause; photographs, interviews, autographs. Heaps of presents have also come. The Indian community have given addresses, a gold watch and chain and a medallion of gold." He mentioned some incidents: "One day a handsome lady came smiling up to me in the dining room: 'Sir, may I have the honour of shaking your hand?' I wondered and extended a ready hand. 'I have got into trouble on your account,' says she. I am duly grieved and enquire why. 'I exclaimed in the company of several lady friends that you had more brains than all the Australians put together; the wives of the Ministers chid me for having lost my head!'"

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 173.

The Parliamentary dinner on June 27, in Melbourne, was the culmination of his activities in Australia. It was a roaring success. Some of the letters he received showed an exquisite degree of sympathy, a tenderness of feeling and a delicacy of touch which were truly touching. Surely, not all people in the West were consumed with pride of race or arrogance of power! He summed up his reception thus: "To say that I was lionised is not to say too much." He was struck by the high standard of living and the democratic spirit in Australia. "*In this land poverty is unknown. Colour prejudice is singularly rare. Whenever the Indian community have entertained me, though they are humble people, they have gone and asked the Premier and Ministers, and these have generally responded. Fancy! That is the spirit of Democracy.*" He felt confident about the success of his visit. The Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, one of the two most influential papers in Australia, told Sastri that his visit was an education to the people of Australia. Sastri himself wrote in a private letter: "My visit has already borne fruit and will be crowned with success. That is certain. The Indians say they already feel several inches taller while the whites declare their eyes have been opened."<sup>4</sup>

By his eloquence, his restraint and his capacity to appreciate the other point of view as well as his own and, above all, by his personality, Sastri created an atmosphere favourable to the implementation of his 1921 Resolution. He also secured promises of redress of some local grievances.

Sastri found that certain influential people in Australia were not well informed of the objectives of the Resolutions of the Imperial Conferences of 1918 and 1921 and feared that the latter reversed the former. The Resolution of 1918 denied the right of free migration between the Dominions and gave each Dominion the right to restrict immigration from other Dominions. The Resolution of 1921 confirmed it, but pleaded that Indians lawfully resident in the Dominions should be given full franchise rights. It was, however, feared in Australia that Sastri intended to plead for free and unrestricted immigration of Indians into Australia. Sastri had to give repeated assurances that no such object was part of the 1921 Resolution or of his mission.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.



"Had I," reported Sastri, "shown the slightest disposition to throw doubt on the validity of the 1918 compact, my mission would have been foredoomed to failure."

In the course of his official report to the Government of India, Sastri said of his mission in Australia:

"Even more gratifying was the cordial sympathy manifested by all sections of the people to the requests which I made on behalf of the Government of India. The principle of equality of citizenship is now recognised as vital to the continuance of friendly relations between the various parts of the Empire, and there is a general disposition to concede equality in view of the assurance that nothing will be done to disturb the policy of restricted emigration which the majority of Australians look upon as necessary for their economic safety and well-being. . . . The appeal to imperial solidarity, justice and fair play, on which I based my case, evoked widespread response. Ere long it should help to consummate the aspiration which the Government and the people of India have so much at heart."

Regarding the franchise for Indians in Australia, the Rt. Hon. W. M. Hughes wrote to Sastri: "In regard to the franchise, although I am not able to speak on the subject with such assurance and with such finality as on the old-age pensions question, I do not hesitate to repeat in the plainest possible terms that you have brought within the range of practical politics a reform which, but for your visit, would have been most improbable, if not impossible, of achievement." It may be added that the franchise was extended to Indians in Australia in 1925.

There was a somewhat amusing reaction to the grant of political franchise in Australia. Voting at elections is compulsory in that country, and failure to do so is subject to penalties. Some Indians complained that, much as they valued the franchise on a level with the white Australians, it had become a liability to those of them who lived far away from the polling stations and had to travel long distances and incur disproportionate expense to honour the obligation! They valued the vote, but not compulsory voting!

From Australia, Sastri went to New Zealand, where Indians had already the franchise on a level with the whites. The Government assured Sastri that the privilege of old-

age pensions would be extended to Indians and employment would be provided to the unemployed.

Sastri faced a different situation in Canada, partly due to a change in the party in power in Ottawa. At the time of his visit, the Indian population in the whole of Canada numbered about 1,200. About 1,100 of them were concentrated in British Columbia, and they had no municipal, provincial or the Dominion franchise. Sastri pleaded that they should be given the three franchises, and in any event, the Dominion franchise, even if the Provincial Government of British Columbia declined to give them the provincial and municipal franchises. But the Dominion Government declined on the legalistic ground that no commitment had been made when Canada supported the Sastri Resolution at the Imperial Conference in London in 1921!

Mr. Meighen was the Prime Minister of Canada in 1921 and had attended the Conference. At the time of Sastri's visit to Canada, the Prime Minister was the Rt. Hon. Mackenzie King. King argued that the Sastri Resolution had said that "it was desirable" to extend the franchise to Indians lawfully domiciled in the Dominions. It was a wish but not a promise; it did not bind the Government of Canada to implement it! He, however, gave an assurance that he would refer the matter to the Canadian Parliament at a suitable opportunity. On September 5, 1922, King wrote to Sastri: "I desire to assure you that at the earliest favourable moment, the Government will be pleased to invite the consideration of Parliament to your request that the natives of India resident in Canada be granted Dominion Parliamentary franchise on terms and conditions identical with those which govern the exercise of that right by the Canadian citizens generally."

Though the main purpose of Sastri's visit was in the interests of Indians in that Province, some of them gave him a hostile reception because he had in India opposed the Non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi and was representing the Government of India, which the Mahatma had denounced as "satanic." They sent a message through a British Christian missionary asking him not to land in Vancouver, but to return to India! But by his patience, courtesy and understanding, he soon won over the opposition and was heard with attention and respect.

Though he was well received in Canada, Sastri was not

hopeful of King implementing the Resolution of 1921. At the next Imperial Conference held in London in 1923, King showed his hand. Anticipating that references would be made to his action on the Sastri Resolution, he cornered Meighen on his interpretation of Canada's obligation. On June 20, 1923, King asked Meighen if the latter had given a pledge in 1921 that Canada would accord the Dominion franchise to Indians in British Columbia. Meighen gave an evasive reply. He said: "The words are English and the words are simple. I understand them fully, and if the Prime Minister [King] does not, I must leave it to him just where he is." Meighen felt driven to say: "No human being understood anything of the sort. The words are very plain, and there is no misunderstanding them."

Speaking about Sastri's visit to Canada, King said: "I am not sure that Mr. Sastri's visit has made it easier for us to deal with this problem. I would put it in this way. Mr. Sastri's visit helped to direct attention of the country to something which, I imagine, the greater part of the country did not know anything about.... Once Mr. Sastri began delivering his speeches, the Labour Councils from one end of the country to another began to receive communications from Labour Organisations in British Columbia asking them to take care that such standards as labour had won in British Columbia were maintained. The forces that were opposed to granting the franchise to Indians became organised in a way they had not been before."<sup>5</sup>

King's speech was a welcome windfall to Smuts. In a Memorandum, which he submitted to the Imperial Conference in 1923, Smuts said that Sastri had made the problem of Indians in the Dominions worse by his speeches in the Dominions he visited in 1922. "He has, for instance, never failed, whenever opportunity presented itself, to attack the Indian policy of South Africa and has thereby greatly exasperated public opinion in that Dominion, already very sensitive on that issue. In other Dominions he has made people alive to the issue—indeed he has largely created it. The claim he has everywhere vigorously pressed for equal franchise rights for Indians over the whole Empire has not only gone further than the local claims of the Indians themselves, but has tended to raise opposition in

<sup>5</sup> *Imperial Conference, 1923, Appendices to the Summary of Proceedings* Cmd. 1918, 1923, p. 105.

quarters where it did not exist before. It is because I foresaw this development that I did not invite Mr. Sastri to include South Africa in his mission. It is not alleged that the economic position of Indians in other parts of the Empire is bad. It is admitted that they are successful and thriving under the laws of the Dominions and are in most respects economically better off than they would be in India. But the claim is put forward for equal political rights throughout the Empire, and its denial is looked upon as a stigma, as an affront to our Indian fellow subjects, and no questions are more difficult and dangerous than those involving national dignity and honour."<sup>6</sup>

The argument of Smuts that Indians in the Dominions were better off than they would have been in India did not justify the denial of political rights to them in the Dominions; it was itself an argument for extending the franchise to them. Apart from that, the question of self-respect or *izzat*, as Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru of India put it at the 1923 Imperial Conference, was involved. Nobody would be a willing member of an organisation on the basis of his racial inferiority.

Smuts was indignant when Sastri lamented that the British Empire had become a Boer Empire, an empire which was swamped by Boer ideals. He retorted that "the Indian difficulties have arisen, and continue to grow, in a part of South Africa where there are almost no Boers at all, in an almost purely British community."<sup>7</sup> He advocated at the 1923 Imperial Conference that the Sastri Resolution of 1921 should be reversed, as it was a mistake. Common allegiance to the common sovereign did not involve common political rights in the common Empire. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru countered this view. He said: "There is an essential confusion in the position which General Smuts takes. Really, the fact of the matter is this: that you cannot, according to modern law of citizenship and according to the latest development of thought on this subject, have two kinds of citizenship in the same Empire, a higher and a lower."<sup>8</sup>

It should be added that in 1947 Canada endowed the Indians in British Columbia with all the franchises. It went further than Australia and New Zealand; it admitted fresh

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Indian immigration to Canada on a quota basis, somewhat similar to the system which the United States of America had adopted. Sastri's plea at the Imperial Conference of 1921 has been realised in all the Dominions except, of course, South Africa.

During his foreign tours, Sastri criticised the Non-cooperation movement in India. His action was severely criticised by Indian nationalists in India and abroad. Some of his friends and admirers were doubtful of its necessity or appropriateness. In their view, Indians should present a united front and speak with one voice and not disclose their internal differences abroad. But Sastri thought otherwise. He was by personal conviction opposed to Non-cooperation and had repeatedly given expression to it in India. It was no secret confined to India but was known abroad already. He could not avoid references to it when abroad nor conceal it, nor prevaricate for the sake of a united front. He would be quoted against himself. Further, he was also representing the Government of India and, in that capacity, he could not seem to support Non-cooperation, as no Government could support it against itself. It was, however, no pleasure for him to criticise it abroad; but he could not avoid the unpleasant duty. His cross-bench mind, however, enabled him, while opposing the Mahatma's policy, to admire him personally at the same time. In his article on "Gandhi the Man—A Consideration of the Man and His Message Apart from His Political Activities" in the *Survey Graphic* of February, 1922, Sastri gave perhaps the most faithful, comprehensive, concise and illuminating account of the Mahatma's non-political philosophy and work.

"Politics is not easily separable from life. Mr. Gandhi would not countenance the separation, for his great aim is to strip life of its sophistications and reduce it to its own nature—simple, rounded, pure. It merely happens that for the moment his activity is in the field of politics. . . . His real and final objective is the radical reform of humankind. . . . The cardinal rule is non-violence. Non-violence is of the heart as well as of the body. By thought, word or act, you may not injure your adversary. . . . But as the adversary does not follow the rule, you will be subjected to great suffering and loss. Rejoice in the suffering and loss and court them; if you cannot rejoice in them, do not avoid or complain against them. Love your enemies; if you can-

not love them, pardon them and never retaliate against them."

After describing several aspects of the Mahatma's philosophy, Sastri referred to his practice:

"These and similar doctrines, which appear harsh to the ordinary person, form the substance of Mr. Gandhi's ethic.... Their propounder practises them in the spirit and in the letter, and the limitations on their practice do not proceed from any tenderness for himself or his relatives.... He knows no fear and shrinks from nothing which he advises others to do.... The present writer stood by as he wiped the sores of a leper with the ends of his own garment. In fact, it is his complete mastery of the passions, his realisation of the ideal of a *sannyasin* in all the rigour of its eastern conception, which accounts for the great hold he has over the masses of India and has crowned him with the title of Mahatma or the Great Soul."

Nobody could have paid a greater tribute to the Mahatma's personality than Sastri in concluding the article:

"The writer of these lines is not one of Mr. Gandhi's political followers or a disciple of his in religion. But he claims to have known him for some years and to have been a sympathetic student of his teachings. He has felt when near him the chastening effects of a great personality. He has derived much strength from observing the working of an iron will. He has learned from a living example something of the nature of duty and the worship due to her. He has occasionally caught some dim perception of the great things that lie hidden below the surface and of the struggles and tribulations which invest life with its awe and grandeur. An ancient Sanskrit verse says: 'Do not tell me of holy waters or stone images; they may cleanse us, if they do, after a long period. A saintly man purifies at sight'."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Servant of India*, March 9, 1922, p. 66.

## *THE SASTRI PLAN*

SASTRI returned to India from his Dominion tour on November 24, 1922. Soon after, he gave a series of lectures in several places in India recounting his experiences in the Dominions and assessing the results. In December, 1922, he presided over the session of the National Liberal Federation of India in Nagpur. At the outset of his address he paid a tribute to Montagu, who had been forced out of office as Secretary of State for India and who had ceased to be a member of the House of Commons.

"In the long history of our British connection, no one has loved India more, no one has sacrificed more for her, no one has been more courageous or persistent in the application to her of the noble principles of Liberalism, no one amongst the front-bench politicians in England has had a more thorough or sympathetic knowledge and appreciation of her problems or her ambitions, no one has had a higher conception of her destiny within the British Commonwealth and no one has put together a more substantial record of actual achievement in the pursuit of that destiny. We all regretted very much the sinister intrigues which deprived him of office and we regret still more those cross-currents of English politics which have resulted in his exclusion from Parliament altogether. What a loss it is in these days when there is reasonable fear of reaction or stagnation in Indian affairs!... India thinks of him with sorrow made poignant by her gratitude and sends him her wishes for a future career worthy of his great services to India and to the British Commonwealth."

While the new Government in England had promised to

respect the new Constitution of India in the letter and the spirit, it held out no hope of advance. On the other hand, experience in India gave room for the apprehension that the Constitution would be respected in the letter and violated in the spirit. The situation required that public men should speak out without fear or favour and "save the community from injury and the statesman from blunders." He then took a broad yet brief survey of the political situation as he found it. The policy of the new Constitution required steady and continuous progress towards responsible government and not a sullen standstill for ten years when a new review would be undertaken by the British Parliament. One of the main features of the Constitution was the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the public services. Sastri gave a wealth of statistics to show that the association was not progressing fast enough in the higher levels of the Secretariats in the Centre and in the Provinces; indeed, Indians were not getting even their due! As the British personnel was more expensive than the Indian, the general poverty of Indians counselled more rapid Indianisation.

Referring to the Army in India, Sastri said: "The Army question, however, is the test of tests for the *bona fides* of the British Government. Its urgency arises from two considerations, either of them strong enough by itself, but both put together of paramount and overpowering force." The first was financial. The Government of India had themselves made recommendations for the reduction of defence expenditure by, among other measures, the Indianisation of its commissioned ranks. The second was that India could not be a Dominion in the fullest sense without the means of self-defence. In a Resolution dated March 4, 1862, the British House of Commons had said:

"That this House, while fully recognising the claims of all parts of the British Empire to Imperial aid in their protection against perils arising from the consequences of Imperial policy, is of the opinion that Colonies exercising the right of self-government ought to undertake the main responsibility of providing for their own internal order and security, and ought to assist in their own external defence."

India no doubt paid the bill to the full and even more,



but the officer-ranks were closed to Indians. Montagu, with prophetic insight, had said in the House of Commons on December 5, 1919: "Do not deny India self-government because she cannot take her proper share in her own defence and then deny to her people the opportunity of learning to defend themselves."

This policy was like adding insult to injury and was on a par with the policy which denied self-government to India because of her illiteracy and at the same time defeated every effort to efface illiteracy! Sastri uttered a warning: "The delay aggravates anti-British feeling every day, and a loyal citizen feels it his duty to sound a serious note of warning and trusts that it will not be construed as a threat."

Turning to the status of Indians abroad, Sastri deprecated retaliation. He pointed out that the number of Dominion nationals in India was small and India's retaliation would not amount to much. "On the other hand, if we did retaliate, we should have shot our last arrow, and our opponents might cry quits. I am sure that our nationals domiciled abroad will not thank us in the end, for we shall have lost the moral advantage we now possess in urging their claims." He was also hopeful that Indians in Australia and Canada would soon be rid of their few disabilities because of the direct negotiations between the two countries and India, and it was too soon to give up hope of amelioration and think of retaliation.

Sastri next turned to the working of the new Montagu Constitution. He noted with satisfaction that till the resignation of Montagu the reforms worked well and in a liberal spirit, practice being in advance of the law. An instance of it was that the Central Legislature was invited to discuss the Defence Budget though such discussion was excluded by the Constitution. Both the officials and the non-officials behaved with commendable moderation and restraint, ensuring the smooth working of the Constitution, its authors "building better than they knew."

But there was a lamentable change for the worse since Montagu's resignation. "But has this great chapter closed? Are we no longer a happy family? Have the authorities begun to weary of well-doing? Are they pulling themselves back? One would not like to believe so, but there are disquieting portents which may not be overlooked, and they proceed from a quarter where, while Mr. Montagu was in

office, Indian interests never failed to find a champion." Indeed, it was the ambition of Montagu, with humorous exaggeration, to "efface himself" and let India develop self-government by quiet conventions. Sastri pointed out that the revival of the habit of previous sanction of the Secretary of State for the policies of the Government of India narrowed the possibilities of the latter agreeing with the Indian Legislature in the first instance. Far from tending to efface himself, Lord Peel, the new Conservative Secretary of State for India, was intruding too often and over a wide range of affairs.

Diarchy in the Provinces had outlived itself, said Sastri. It rendered the progressive work of the popular ministers difficult. For instance, a popular minister was in charge of Industries, but not of Factories; of Agriculture, but not Irrigation! He pleaded that, as a test and as a preparation, Diarchy had served its purpose and had since become a cog and an irritation and should be eliminated without waiting for the statutory period of ten years for revision of the Constitution. Indeed, Montagu himself, as well as Mr. H.A.L. Fisher, had said that, while a review was obligatory at the end of ten years, there was nothing to prevent an earlier review.

At the Bombay Provincial Liberal Conference, Sastri had ventured to suggest tentatively that Diarchy should not be introduced in the Central Government of India. But at the National Liberal Federation in Nagpur, he reversed it and fell in publicly with the view of the majority of Liberals.

Sastri finally referred to the status of the Liberal Party in India. "We have from the very nature of the case to answer charges from two opposite ends. Our extremist countrymen complain that we have merged ourselves in the bureaucracy and must be held responsible for their blunders, high-handedness and repression. Our answer must be firm and frank. So long as they will proclaim war on the established government, talk openly of revolution, inculcate disloyalty and rash political action, . . . we must sternly disapprove and stoutly oppose." On the other hand, the officials criticised the Liberals for lack of organisation and vigorous propaganda in support of the Government. "When they attack us for indecision of thought, fear of unpopularity and a tendency to take up the most violent and pas-

sionate cries of the extremists and echo them feebly, thus affording no constant support to Government, we must repudiate the charges as unfounded. Our business is to promote our country's welfare, to enlarge her political status through the present Constitution, to secure her ordered progress, and compatibly with these aims, but not otherwise, to support Government.... We will oppose and thwart them when they neglect their duty or defy our wishes.... As our motto is Ordered Progress, we do not despise compromise in public affairs, provided it is honourable, advances the present position and does not bar further progress."<sup>1</sup>

After the Liberal Federation, Sastri visited several towns in the then Central Provinces and Berar, and later the cities of Madras, Poona and Bombay, among others, and spoke of the political situation as the Liberals saw it.

On January 12, 1923, he spoke at the 1921 Club in Madras and dwelt on two points on which he differed from Mrs. Annie Besant and to which he had referred in his earlier speeches. The first main point of difference was about self-determination. He would have India rise to full Dominion Status through the existing Constitution and not through a convention unrelated to the existing Constitution and the Legislatures. It would be imprudent to desire a brand new Constitution with everything revised and recast and with "India" written on every line of it. The second point of departure was the type of Constitution that India should have in view of the admitted fact that "the faults of democracy are many and they are serious." Should India at the very outset apply all the correctives which Democracy, as then prevailing in England and America, for instance, called for? Sastri was opposed to it. He would have India self-governing in the first instance before attempting a new Constitution which would be free from defects.

Sastri submitted a Memorandum to the Delhi Conference which was convened by Annie Besant and which was presided over by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru on March 12, 1923, but which Sastri was unable to attend. He would not countenance, even for a moment, the morbid cry of Non-cooperation and paralyse all national work till Swaraj was attained. He would work with allies who had faith in the

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, December 28, 1922, Supplement.

current Constitution, no matter whether it was large or small. He advocated Provincial Autonomy in the sense that the Governor would be more or less the constitutional chief and his cabinet would consist exclusively of ministers responsible to the Legislature. The Central Government also should be responsible to the Central Legislature, except for defence and for political and ecclesiastical affairs. In view of the refusal of the new Conservative Secretary of State to advance the Constitution as desired by the Indian Legislative Assembly in 1921, Sastri advocated that the next general election to the Indian Legislative Assembly should elect members pledged to press for immediate advance. Such a legislature with such a mandate should convene a convention to make proposals to amend the present Constitution so as to convert it into an instrument for Dominion Status. No step should be omitted to swell the volume of public opinion in support of the proposals of the convention.

Posing the question what India should do if the British Government did not respond, he said: "I do not hesitate to answer that another effort should be made, and, if necessary, yet another. We must win in the end. Besides, all the time the convention is at work, the legislature would function as usual, and the work of nation-building would go on continuously under the provisions of the present Act. I would not listen to the advice of those who would back up the convention or the deputation [to England] by threats of labour troubles, students' strikes or civil disobedience of sorts. Constitutional agitation has been rewarded before and will yet be rewarded. A sudden catastrophe may frustrate all our hopes, like some untoward development in Kenya, but to the extent that we can control events, our influence must be cast on the side of faith, hope and charity."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, February 15, 1923, p. 29.

## COUNCIL OF STATE, 1923

SASTRI attended the Delhi session of the Council of State in 1923. On January 24, 1923, the Despatch dated November 22, 1922, of the Secretary of State for India, Lord Peel, that no Constitutional advance was possible, was communicated to the Council. The next day the British Government's decision to appoint a Royal Commission on the superior services in India was announced. The same day a non-official resolution asked for the publication of the correspondence between the Government of India and the Secretary of State for India on the subject. Government opposed it on the ground that the correspondence was confidential and asked the Council to accept the Commission as a *fait accompli* and welcome it because of its wide terms of reference. Sastri admitted that the opposition to the Royal Commission as such was greatly weakened by its wide terms of reference, but all the same asked for the publication of the correspondence. He shrewdly suspected that there were differences between the Government of India and the Secretary of State for India and that the latter overruled the former and the publication of the correspondence would disclose them. With consummate skill and delicacy he commiserated the Government of India for having deprived themselves of the help of the Indian Legislature and the public in their fight with the Secretary of State.

But the public of India had a different objective. The Montagu Declaration of 1917 had distinguished the Government of India from the British Government and co-ordinated them as equals. It was up to the Government of India to free themselves from the leading strings of the Secretary

of State and bank on the support of public opinion in India and move towards greater autonomy. Sastri feared that the new Secretary of State, Lord Peel, had set at naught the principle that, where the executive and legislature in India concurred on any matter, the Secretary of State should not, as a rule, interfere, unless imperial interests were involved. The publication of the correspondence between the Government of India and the Secretary of State for India on the appointment of the Royal Commission would reveal to what extent the Government of India represented the views of the people of India and if the Secretary of State overruled them.

A non-official resolution was moved in the Council of State on January 30, 1923, to the effect that Irrigation should be treated on a par with Railways and that the provision of funds for its development should be the same as for Railways. While Irrigation which benefited the vast agricultural population of India was neglected, Railways, which profited the traders, particularly the British who constituted a minority, were unfairly promoted. Sastri intervened to say that no invidious comparison between Irrigation and Railways was justified. It was enough if funds for irrigation were provided on a "more liberal scale." He added that it was impossible to spend money usefully on Irrigation as rapidly as on Railways.

Two official Resolutions were moved in the Council of State on January 31, 1923, to the effect that no action be taken in India on the Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Conference of 1921 to provide workmen's compensation, social insurance and the protection of women and child-workers in agriculture, on the ground that such measures were impractical in India at the time. While supporting the official resolutions, Sastri moved amendments asking for enquiries to be made if such ameliorative measures were practicable in such organised industries as tea and rubber. He argued that "plantation" agriculture could be distinguished from the ordinary scattered agriculture as the labourers in them were largely imported migrants with no ancestral homes or alternative employment in the plantations. While he was anxious that no labourers, either in agriculture or industry, should be denied the humane conditions of work which the International Labour Organisation recommended, he would not

deny them to some simply because they could not be extended to all. He reinforced his recommendation on the plea that he had, against opposition, secured a place for India in the Governing Body of the International Labour Office on the ground that India was among the few countries which had been most faithful to the Organisation and had ratified its recommendations and taken action thereon. His amendments were, however, defeated.

A non-official resolution was moved on February 28, 1923, that a "reasonable proportion" of Indians be appointed to the cadre of Railway Traffic Inspectors. Government opposed it and moved an amendment that Indians should be appointed "in larger numbers." The Government spokesman professed that the Traffic Inspector's task was so onerous that few Indians were qualified for it and, as the number of posts in that cadre was small and most of them were under private companies and not directly under Government, it was not possible to accept any fixed proportion. In the course of his speech, Sastri recalled that twelve years ago when Gokhale moved a resolution for the rapid Indianisation of the Railway Services, state and private, the Government spokesman had said that Indians were, as a rule, fatalistic by conviction, and that the European community, who had large interests, would object to their employment on a much larger scale. On the present occasion, instead of condemning Indians as a class as fatalists, a formidable array of the duties of Railway Inspectors was enumerated to imply that Indians would be unable to discharge them! Sastri was not convinced. He then lashed out that Indians must have the run of the whole service in the country. It was theirs, root and branch. Why should they ask for a proportion? As rapidly as circumstances permitted, more rapidly than Government and the Railways wished, the services should become Indian. Left to himself he would leave the matter to be settled in a place where a better notion prevailed of what was due to Indians and what was due to other members of Indian nationality.

Immediately after, Sastri moved his Resolution that the Indian members of the Indian Civil Service should be given opportunities to get insight into the problems of higher administration and that at least one Indian of the Service should be appointed to the posts of Secretary, Joint Secretary, or Deputy Secretary in every department of the

Government of India. In moving it, he said that he had fondly hoped that once an Indian got into the ICS, he would be admitted to "full bliss of Paradise," but he discovered that, like the Peri, they had only a glimpse of it. He gave figures to show that there was not a single Indian member of the ICS in any of the posts he had mentioned. He admitted that the practice of the Government of India of recruiting their Secretaries, etc., from among the experienced officers from the Provinces was salutary. And if there were not enough of them in the Provinces, it was the fault of the Government. He accepted a non-official amendment to substitute "Indian" for "Indian Member of the Indian Civil Service" to widen the scope of the Resolution. The Government spokesman, in his speech, paid a handsome, if diplomatic, compliment to Sastri:

"I have not for long followed with close attention the speeches and writings of my Right Honourable friend without failing to recognise that any case to which he lends his powerful and persuasive advocacy will be found on issue of moment; that it will be presented not only with eminent ability, but with scrupulous fairness and moderation, that it will be in close relation with fact and that it will be an attempt, and a powerful attempt, to translate into practical politics some important and salutary principle."<sup>1</sup>

He was in agreement with Sastri in the move to associate Indians increasingly in the administration, but he was appalled at the idea of introducing racial discrimination in making appointments in the Secretariat of the Government of India, which Sastri's Resolution involved! He, therefore, moved an amendment: "Indians should be afforded wider opportunities." Sastri rejected the amendment and in righteous indignation made a speech which the Government spokesman thought was "severe," coming from Sastri. "I am astonished at the way in which he [Government spokesman] enunciated the doctrine that the Government of India cannot afford to pay any consideration to conditions other than efficiency. No one wished, not certainly I, that the Government of India should depart from that principle to the slightest degree, but cannot assent to the implication that the Government of India have hitherto

<sup>1</sup> Council of State Debates, February 28, 1923, p. 1030.



scrupulously adhered to that principle." He frankly accused Government of distrust of Indians, which was out of place under the new Constitution. He granted that if Indians were given the posts he listed because they were Indians, some Europeans were bound to suffer and feel that they were subjected to a colour bar. With sarcasm, unusual to him, he said: "I am very happy again that the Honourable Members on the opposite side appreciate for the first time the odium of erecting a colour barrier. They see for the first time, when it threatens to be applied to them, what it is to be denied an opportunity because of one's colour." He then bitterly referred to the series of broken promises. "This policy of Indianisation is nothing new. Ever since the great Proclamation of Queen Victoria we have been promised that in our own country there should be no governing caste and that all posts should be open to us. That however was long denied in practice as every one knows. . . . Time passed. . . . Then came the Declaration of August, 1917, which put in the very van of its programme the increasing association of Indians in the public services. Not that alone, . . . It was put into the Preamble to the Act and it has therefore the force of Parliamentary enactment. There is the second promise, the third promise of the Queen and King and His Grace the Duke of Connaught, and they are all promises, promises and promises. I come here today asking by a Resolution that in respect of one matter this hundred-times promise should be carried out. And what does the Honourable the Home Secretary tell me? He offers me another promise! The Honourable Home Secretary must not be offended with me if I refuse to accept a promise after I have had abundant promises from far higher authorities. I am here, Sir, to ask for their fulfilment and not for fresh promises. We have had them till we are sick."<sup>2</sup>

Sastri's Resolution was carried—a comparatively rare phenomenon in those days!

The Council of State took up on March 15, 1923, a Bill which was introduced by a non-official in the Legislative Assembly and was passed by it against the opposition of Government. Its object was to give legislative effect to certain International Conventions for the Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children which India had accepted. The question at issue was whether the age of children to be

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, February 28, 1923, p. 1013.

protected by law should be twenty-one as in advanced countries, or eighteen or sixteen as preferred by some less advanced countries. The Assembly, by a majority of three, raised the age from sixteen to eighteen. The Bill as passed by the Assembly was introduced in the Council by Government. In doing so, Government moved an amendment that the Bill would come into operation on a date to be fixed by the Government of India. The purpose of it was to refer the matter again to the local Governments and public opinion. It was also intended to take time to bring all other relevant legislation into line with this Bill, so that the age of consent would be uniform. Sastri supported the Bill and opposed the Government amendment. In doing so, he recalled that he, as the representative of India at the League of Nations in 1921, had agreed, along with Japan and China, to a lower age of sixteen, though he had personally no objection to twenty-one. He would, however, support eighteen which the Legislative Assembly had proposed. He admitted that there would be opposition from a section of the orthodox public even to this modest reform. He recalled that in his younger days he was a party to the breaking up of a public meeting which sought to resist the raising of the age of consent. He realised that it was impossible to legislate in such matters far in advance of public opinion, and he appreciated Government's hesitation to support the present Bill without bringing the general law into conformity with it and their desire to postpone the commencement of the Act to that end. When the Government moved the amendment to leave it to the Government when it was to be implemented, Sastri opposed it as it was a manoeuvre on the part of Government to go behind the vote of the Assembly and practically veto the reform. The amendment was carried. Finally, at the third reading of the Bill, as amended, Sastri gave his support, and explained that his objection was constitutional. After the vote of the Assembly, it is not regular for the executive Government to try in an indirect manner to resubmit it to public opinion. When it was explained by the Government spokesman that the object of the amendment was primarily to ensure that the whole of the Penal Code was brought into conformity with the wishes of the Assembly and the Council, Sastri expressed his entire approbation of the procedure.

There was an unprecedented constitutional crisis when

the Indian Finance Bill came up for discussion in the Council of State on March 23, 1923. The Government had proposed to increase the salt duty from one rupee four annas to two rupees and eight annas per maund, with a view to covering the deficit in the Budget. The proposal was heavily defeated in the Indian Legislative Assembly. Whereupon the Governor-General, under 67-B of the Constitution, "recommended" to the Council of State to pass the Government's original proposal. It was an open secret that if the Council failed to do so, the Governor-General would resort to his reserve powers and "certify" the tax and legalise it! Sastri, in opposing the enhanced tax, explained his general attitude towards the salt tax as such in the scheme of Indian taxation. At the outset, he contended that the salt tax was obnoxious in principle and was burdensome to millions of Indians who lived on or below the margin of subsistence, and to whom an anna was not a bagatelle and a rupee was a considerable proportion of their extremely restricted budget. And he recalled how his own parents were so poor that his mother had to refuse a gift of mangoes because she could not buy the salt to pickle them. It was the ambition of ancient monarchs of India as well as of the British Rulers to abolish the salt tax as soon as possible. But even non-officials had come to regard it as an integral part of the Indian tax system, the only difference being its incidence. He then quoted the weighty opinion of Gokhale who would not object to it as part of the fiscal system but would keep the incidence at one rupee normally and raise it only under the direst necessity of the State and for a temporary period, till the emergency was over. If Government had offered that the proposed increase was only temporary and not a permanent measure, there would have been less opposition. But he strongly objected to a permanent tax of two rupees and a half, to be legalised by "certification." The Council of State passed the Governor-General's "recommendation," but the Assembly threw it out again, and the Governor-General "certified" it and made it law! It was a major constitutional crisis and challenge, which was most unfortunate and could easily have been avoided. For the moment, the Government of India seemed to have smashed the Montagu Reforms. Legislation by executive "certification" was bad enough; "certification" of taxation was worse; and worst of all was "certification" of the salt tax!

## KENYA

Soon after his return to India from his Dominion Tour, Sastri was involved in the Kenya problem. The decision of the British Government on the status of Indians in Kenya in 1923 was perhaps the greatest shock to him in his public life and roused him to incandescent indignation and drove him for once in his life to advocate retaliation and Non-cooperation, irrespective of consequences. His faith in the British Empire was shaken as never before or ever after, but it was not lost.

Kenya was a Crown Colony directly administered by the British Cabinet through the Secretary of State for the Colonies. In 1920, its population consisted of less than ten thousand Europeans, including some from South Africa, more than twenty-two thousand Indians, and over two and a half million Africans. In 1908, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, by an executive order, reserved the Highlands in Kenya for exclusive settlement by the whites. In 1913, there was a proposal to segregate Indians in urban areas for residence and trade. The Kenya Legislative Council, consisting of nominated members, official and non-official, sought to restrict immigration from India. In 1920, the Kenya whites were given the privilege of electing their representatives in the legislature and were allotted eleven seats, while the official majority was retained.

These developments hurt the self-respect of Indians in Kenya. They demanded equality with the Europeans. They were supported by the Government of India and the Indian leaders. In response to this pressure, they were offered just two elected seats in the legislature and on a separate electoral roll! Indians protested vigorously.

and immigration with European settlers.

Sastri made it clear that the word "community" in the Sastri Resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1921 applied only to the self-governing Dominions and not to Crown Colonies and, at any rate, it did not apply to the whites only in Kenya. The African needed protection from the whites and not from the Indians. It was a bitter irony that the Government of Kenya was spending its revenues, to which Indians also contributed, to promote immigration of whites, even from erstwhile enemy countries like Germany, while trying to keep out Indians, who were British subjects and who fought side by side with the British in the First War. The status of Indians in Kenya did not affect them alone; it vitally affected India and the Commonwealth. If India lost in Kenya, she would lose in the Dominions and all along the line, including her own internal status. He concluded: "We cannot afford to lose here. There will be very few friends left in India to plead the cause of the British Empire. You will wipe out the friends of Britain in India by any such settlement. Britain herself in the eyes of the world will be generally condemned as having fallen a victim to moral decay."<sup>2</sup>

Surprisingly enough, the Government of India declined to accept the Resolution because of the part referring to immigration, though they did not vote against it. Every single European member of the Council and every member of the Government left the Chamber before the Resolution was voted upon!

The situation was so apprehensive that the Indian Legislature decided to send betimes a deputation, headed by Sastri, to London. The Deputation sailed from India on April 4, 1923. Sastri and his two colleagues, helped by friends like Mr. H. S. L. Polak, kept up a practically non-stop campaign in England. He addressed several public meetings, gave many press interviews and held discussions with the authorities, particularly the India Office.

The India Office was at first frank, cordial and cooperative and persuaded Sastri to accept the Wood-Winterton proposals, though they gave Indians less than equality. Sastri gave the assurance that Indians did not seek dominance in Kenya because of their superior numbers but

<sup>2</sup> *The Kenya Problem*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Servant of India*, March 15, 1923, p. 80.

would be content with equality in representation on a common roll. In an interview to the *Manchester Guardian*, he struck a personal note. If the Indian claim to equality was rejected "I should feel it personally as a terrible blow. I have preached both in India and in the Dominions the doctrine that this Empire is not a White Empire and that it is going to realise sooner than other organised communities of the world the great principle of equality and brotherhood. If the Kenya question is decided on wrong lines, India will refuse to listen to such talk."<sup>4</sup> He even feared that India might begin to think of going out of the Empire. He opposed the grant of Responsible Government to Kenya until the Africans were able to take over the administration.

The burden of his many utterances was that Indians unreservedly admitted that in the administration of Kenya the interests of the Africans must be paramount; that neither the white nor the Indian, nor both together, should have any power over them, but only the Colonial Office in London; and if the franchise be given to any one in the Colony, it should be given equally to all with the same qualifications and under the same conditions and that Indians were prepared to accept less than their due on a common electoral roll; failing which, they should have equal representation on a separate roll. The essential demand is for equality, even in a limited sphere.

Speaking at the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, London, on June 5, 1923, Sastri made a fervent plea to uphold the flag of freedom for all. "During the war you rose to sympathy with the small nationalities of the world. You set the flag of freedom flying. I beg of you on my knees not to take it down. That flag of freedom was not of freedom for you alone, but for the world, and, especially, for the League of Nations which we call the British Commonwealth. I beg you not to dishonour the Union Jack."<sup>5</sup>

He struck a similar note at the great meeting in the Queen's Hall, London, on June 26, 1923, and added that he knew no greater calamity than that India had no self-respecting place within this great and beneficent organisation of the Commonwealth. He contrasted the two conflicting ideals struggling for supremacy in the Commonwealth. The British, standing for equality, irrespective of race, and the Boer, standing for white superiority. South Africa had

<sup>4</sup> *The Kenya Problem*, p. 19

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24

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<sup>4</sup> *The Kenya Problem*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.



proclaimed and practised the latter. It made for disunion and disintegration of the Commonwealth. The poison should be localised and sterilised as far as possible, and should not, in any event, be allowed to spread to the other parts of the Commonwealth.

In his speeches in London before the Kenya Decision and later in India, he singled out Smuts as the source of infection. The Kenya whites were banking on the support of Smuts. In his Queen's Hall speech, he said: "I shall regard it as an abdication and a complete surrender on the part of the Imperial Cabinet if it permits the head of the South African Government to dictate to it what its policy should be in the conduct of this, the chosen instrument in the hands of Providence for the redemption of mankind."<sup>6</sup>

Some British leaders thought it unnecessary to placate India at the expense of the Kenya whites on the ground that India, which was on the way to self-government, would leave the Empire and seek relations with China and Japan. In reply to them, Sastri said he was amazed at the postulate: such an idea had never occurred to any Indian as yet, and would not if Indians were treated as equals and not as inferiors. With his characteristic eloquence, he apotheosised the destiny of the British Empire:

"I belong to a Society whose fundamental postulate is that the connection between Great Britain and India is meant for high purposes under God, that some of those purposes have been achieved, but that there are larger purposes still that have not yet unfolded to the gaze of men, but which the British Commonwealth may, if it will not turn its back with craven spirit upon its destiny, still unfold for the continual benefit of humankind. I have always held that what is apparently beyond the American Republic, the solution of the coloured problem, is going to be one of the greatest achievements of the British Commonwealth."<sup>7</sup>

The India Office, which was frank and helpful at the outset, cooled off later and became secretive. Sastri and his colleagues had good reason to anticipate that the final decision of the Cabinet would be adverse. They made a last-minute effort to influence the decision before it was finalised. Three days before the decision was published,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Servant of India*, July 5, 1923, p. 275.

Sastri, along with his colleagues, submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet regarding the Kenya Highlands and the franchise. "Surely the custodians of the honour and high principles of the Commonwealth cannot afford to make public confession of their impotence to reverse so flagrant a violation of equity as between His Majesty's equal subjects." He pleaded that, if the matter could not be put right at once, it should at least not receive the official sanction of the highest executive authority in the Empire, so that it might more easily be righted under more propitious circumstances. He pleaded that, although the Wood-Winterton Agreement offered Indians less than their deserts, they were reconciled to it because of the common electoral roll. If that too was denied, it would relegate Indians to an inferior status of unredeemed humiliation.

But the plea fell on deaf ears. The fateful decision was published as a White Paper on July 23, 1923. It denied equality of status to Indians with Europeans in Kenya, and a colour bar was sanctioned and imposed by the British Imperial Cabinet! In bitter disappointment, deep humiliation and incensed indignation, Sastri burst out:

"The people of India are no longer equal partners in the British Empire, but unredeemed helots in a Boer empire."

The indignity was rubbed in, as it were, by the procedure adopted by the Cabinet. The European Delegation from Kenya, which threatened violence, were taken into confidence and their consent in writing was taken, *before* the Decision was published! Sastri publicised the threat of the Kenya Europeans to rebel against the British Government and their assurance that the latter dare not send British troops to quell their rebellion, and if they did send, the British soldiers would refuse to act! Indians lost because they could not give similar trouble. Sastri lost caste in England because of this disclosure. The Conservative *Morning Post* asserted that Sastri was the principal agitator in the deplorable conspiracy and demanded his removal from the Privy Council. He was avoided by many who sought him earlier. As he himself put it: "The British Cabinet and the public of London were not ashamed of their having yielded to fear and inflicted grievous wrong on India. They were

\* *The Kenya Problem*, p. 57.

far more angry, because I had taken the world into my confidence."<sup>9</sup>

Winterton, the Under-Secretary of State for India, made a savage attack on Sastri and accused him of being a racialist!<sup>10</sup> On the eve of his departure for India, Sastri wished to say good-bye to Winterton. Winterton refused to see him! Lord Peel, the Secretary of State, subsequently apologised to Sastri for the discourtesy of his deputy.

Sastri saw a ray of hope in that dark despair. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, the leader of the Labour Party in Britain and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, had presided over his Queen's Hall meeting and supported the Kenya Indian case. Sastri requested him to speak out in Parliament when the White Paper was debated. Unable to be present on the occasion, Macdonald authorised Col. Josiah Wedgwood to do so on behalf of the Labour Party.

At the time Sir Ali Imam was in London negotiating with the British Government for the rendition of Berar to His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad. He lived like Royalty, as befitted the envoy of Britain's Ally, the Nizam, and entertained lavishly and had known everybody of quality and influence in London. His mission had failed and he was disappointed and was winding up to return to Hyderabad when the Kenya decision was published. Let Sastri describe the sequence:

"He [Ali Imam] was winding up when my Kenya bubble burst. I swore I must give tongue to my grief and must be heard by as many influential people as possible. Here was an excellent opportunity for him. 'We shall be revenged,' he said. 'I shall be host; you be my guest. I shall ask a thousand people to tea. I will request you at the end to say a *few words*. But let them be many, charge them with your anger and feeling of outraged Empire citizenship; let them bite and sting and burn'."<sup>11</sup>

The party was held at the Hotel Cecil on August 2, 1923. Unusual for him, Sastri read out a prepared speech. He rejected the advice of some friends that India should accept the decision provisionally and wait for better times to get a better solution. He criticised the White Paper in detail and assessed the small gains against the great losses of

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> *Servant of India*, September 6, 1923, p. 382.

<sup>11</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 382.

Indians. Regarding the franchise proposals, he said: "No more contemptuous negative could have been given in answer to India's claim to equality." Bitterly he said: "Not justice or truth, but the amount of trouble that a party is able to cause prevails with His Majesty's Government to-day. Having had this burnt into them, Indians, let us hope, will not ever forget it again." He poured out his lacerated heart: "After waiting for a long time with his proverbial patience and after earning equal treatment a hundred times over, and after endless expostulations and entreaties, and having declared that Kenya supplied the acid test of the Empire and his position in the Empire, the Indian has been cruelly betrayed. The victim of many pledges, the dupe of many promises, his faith in the character for justice and impartiality of the British Empire seemed almost incurable. He is at last undeceived."<sup>12</sup> In an interview with the *Manchester Guardian* Sastri suggested some lines of action to express India's indignation: resignation forthwith of the Indian members of the Government of India; denial of the benefits of the Racial Distinctions Act with regard to special procedure in criminal cases to colonials; compulsory retirement of colonials employed in the military and civil services of India; generally speaking, retaliatory measures with regard to domicile and acquisition of trading and other rights; and boycott of the British Empire Exhibition and the forthcoming political and economic conferences. He would, of course, take care that India did not violate the Constitution or inflict lasting injury on herself or do anything in the spirit of vengeance.

The Kenya campaign in London undermined Sastri's health. He had to spend some months in a nursing home. But he left it too soon in order to speak at the Queen's Hall, with the result that his health broke down again and he reached India on August 24, 1923, an invalid, unable to continue his campaign. He was ordered complete rest, without access even to newspapers. He rested in Bangalore. His colleague in the Servants of India Society, Mr. V. Venkatasubbaiah, stood military guard on him to ensure maximum rest and escape from excitement of any kind.

Before he retired to Bangalore, Sastri insisted on issuing a moving "appeal to the public," in which he advocated dignified boycott by unofficial Indians of Empire functions,

<sup>12</sup> *The Kenya Problem*, p. 44.

like the Empire Exhibition. Perhaps this was the one occasion when he came nearest to advocating unrestrained non-cooperation and retaliation. If the Government of India were a national one, it might have offered its resignation in protest against the Kenya decision; failing it, the public must do its best, without calculating its cost or effectiveness, but just to assert India's self-respect. "With cheap cynicism people fling the word 'ineffective' at all proposals which cannot bring about the surrender of the British Cabinet and the revocation of the settlement of July 23. . . . How dare we expect to punish the mighty?" Nevertheless,

"There is none so weak but he can refuse to part with his self-respect voluntarily; no community so fallen but may reject an ignoble association to which it is under no coercion to surrender. . . . To hit out with all one's strength may not be effective either, but it is at least a vindication of one's manhood. The poet has said that the imprisoned cobra strikes, not so much to punish the tormentor but out of wounded pride."<sup>13</sup>

Commenting on the argument that the caste system in India offered justification for racial discrimination against Indians elsewhere, he said:

"Subdued and chastened, we bow to the penalties inflicted on us by the law of National Karma. But how can they admonish us who profit by our divided conditions and in not a few cases foment it? Are they our Providence? Do they set up as our teachers? If so, let them show us the better way by their example, and not quote our social strata as justification for their unworthy practice. . . . We are endeavouring to get out of these unhealthy institutions. The reactionaries and obscurantists in our country can wish for no better support for their outworn systems than their adoption by the civilised nations of the West in express imitation."

He poured out his sorrow:

"Hard as flint, dry as the Sahara, must be the Indian heart which can survey without emotion the long tale of wrongs and indignities to which our people have been subjected within an

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Empire that talks all the time of human brotherhood and even-handed justice.

"Let us look at Kenya. . . . The British Commonwealth came there only to safeguard our interests. . . . Our armies fought on the soil of Kenya more than once to keep the Union Jack flying. . . . After many years, during which we were invited, employed and encouraged, to be told now, at the bidding of a few narrow-minded whites, that we are a danger to the Native, that we are a moral and physical infection, and that our future immigration must be controlled and finally stopped—this is a refinement of ingratitude and tyranny, the thought of which still lacerates my heart, though it has been my constant companion, night and day, during some months."

To the Government he said:

"It may not be pleasing to Government, but it is good for them to know that there is hardly an intelligent or patriotic Indian who does not interpret and lament the Kenya settlement in the way I do. It may not be pleasing to Government, but it is good for them to know that there is hardly an intelligent and patriotic Indian who does not consider the settlement as setting aside a long succession of righteous pledges in the direction of human brotherhood, in favour of an unrighteous pledge made by incompetent authorities and in the face of earnest protests. It may not be pleasing to Government but it is good for them to know that, when I declare the attenuation of my faith in the British Empire and in British professions the only Indians, even in 'moderate circles,' who dissent are those who avow that they had never any faith in either. The Kenya settlement is a grave national humiliation."

Even in this extremity, it is remarkable that Sastri spoke only of the attenuation of his faith in the British Empire and not of its extinction. For, in the very statement quoted above, he said:

"Far be it from me to ignore or even to underrate the enormous benefits of British rule in India. I have often spoken and written of these and of the glorious mission of the British Commonwealth. And I hope to live to do so again in better times, when British Imperialism shall have shed its lower and assumed its higher character."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

While resting in Bangalore, he visited Mysore, as the guest of His Highness the Maharaja, as also several other places of historical and other interest. As soon as he was well enough to do so, Sastri made a "Farewell Speech" in Bangalore on the Kenya decision, the text of which was "Kenya Lost, Everything Lost." He made pointed reference to the fact that India had no national government responsible to the people of India, which could protect the self-respect and interests of Indians overseas as effectively as other sovereign Governments did. Sir Valentine Chirol, of *The Times*, London, noted the change in Sastri in this respect. He said: "Swaraj has now scarcely a more vigorous supporter than Mr. Sastri who... only a few years ago repeatedly expressed in addressing his fellow-countrymen a faith in the British people and the British Empire such as one rarely hears professed nowadays in India." Sastri was too optimistic when he hoped that when India attained Dominion Status, she would be able to secure equality of status for Indians overseas any more than when she was a Dependency. Even the Independent Republic of India has so far not been able to secure it in South Africa or even in Kenya.

Sastri made a great speech on "Africa or India" at the St. Stephen's College, Delhi, on February 24, 1924, in which he attacked Smuts as the prime mover in the Empire in defence of racial discrimination and of the outrageous decision concerning Kenya. Sastri had heard at the India Office that Smuts had sent many a long cablegram to the British Cabinet, advising them, threatening them, and generally warning them that the British Cabinet were dealing not only with Kenya but also with the whole of Africa, meaning the whole of white Africa.

He frankly admitted that the Kenya decision changed him: "If there is any Indian who can go through the experience through which I went in connection with the Kenya mission, if there is any Indian who could have seen things that I was compelled to see, who could have experienced the utter lack of responsibility that it was my misfortune to encounter in London during the few weeks of bitter sorrow and suffering, if there is any such Indian who has not changed, I think that most of us would disown him. I have changed."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Lord Peel, the Secretary of State for India, advised Sastri to moderate his language and not deal with abstractions but Sastri politely declined. When Sir Malcolm Hailey, the Home Member of the Government of India, advised the acceptance of the Kenya settlement if only in the interest of the Indians in Kenya, who benefited to some extent, Sastri spurned it. The Kenya Indian leaders would have none of it. Sastri regretted that the Government of India, as then constituted, could not and did not stand by Indians as uncompromisingly as the Governor of Kenya stood by the whites in Kenya. He, therefore, pleaded for non-official action. He hoped that some day the true British ideals of the Commonwealth would prevail.

At the 1923 Imperial Conference it was agreed that committees from India should negotiate directly with representatives of the Dominions and Colonies. While the selection of the personnel of the committee from India was under discussion, Sastri's name was not mentioned, but he was pressed by a member of Government to seek an interview with the Viceroy, Lord Reading. Sastri declined to do so, while willing to meet the Viceroy, if invited. Lord Reading had not got over his annoyance with Sastri for his speech at the Viceroy's banquet on May 12, 1922, on the eve of his Dominion tour, and did not invite Sastri.

The Government of India sent a deputation, led by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, to London to negotiate on the status of Indians in the British Colonies. In that connection, Mr. G. A. Natesan gave notice of a resolution in the Council of State asking for the publication of the Brief of Instructions issued by the Government of India to the Deputation and other relevant papers. In the absence of Natesan, Sastri moved it on March 19, 1924. At the outset, he drew out the full significance of direct negotiations, which marked a step in constitutional advance. Among other things, he repudiated the plea that Indians in Kenya were accorded equality with whites in that both were given adult franchise and warned that in so far as the electoral roll was separate and not common, it was a trick to block for ever the introduction of the common roll. It was not a favour but a disservice done to Indians. He repeated his view that, if immigration to Kenya was to be restricted in the interests of the Africans, it should apply to the whites who exploited the Africans, and not the Indians who benefited them. The



most galling feature of the Kenya decision was that white enemy aliens were preferred to Indian subjects of the British Empire. Then he made the somewhat unusual suggestion that, if immigration should at all be regulated, it should be on the American system of quotas in proportion to the existing ratios of Indians and whites in Kenya.

To the Indian members of the Colonies Committee, Sastri sent the following telegram when they were about to sail for England. "India's hopes and good wishes are with you. Be strong. Our cause is just and must win some day if no ignoble compromise now bars the way." And to Mr. Hope Simpson and Sir Benjamin Robertson, who were the British members of the Committee, Sastri sent the following cable: "India prayerfully trusts you will preserve her self-respect and Britain's honour. The Empire cannot long survive the extension of the colour bar beyond South Africa."<sup>16</sup> He also addressed a longish letter to Simpson, who was at the time Chairman of the British Liberal Party Committee on Indian Affairs.

The status of Indians in Kenya and in South Africa was so similar in some respects that the same arguments applied to both. Speaking of the inferior status assigned to Indians in both, Sastri recalled that Sir Umar Hayat Khan had gallantly advocated the use of the bullet to vindicate India's honour. Sastri advocated, rather wished, that the Governor-General in Council in India offered their resignation as they were unable to protect Indians abroad. On March 9, 1924, in the Council of State Sastri said among other things: "If the Governor-General in Council of India should say to the listening world, 'It is impossible for us, as representatives of His Majesty's Government, to govern India if within His Majesty's Dominions, we are unable, and His Majesty's Government are unable, to protect the just rights of the Indian subjects of His Majesty,' I think something would be done which might touch the conscience of the British people. I have still faith in them. . . . I am only saying that between the limit of the begging line that we have taken up and the beginning of the bullet line recommended by Colonel Sir Umar Hayat Khan, there is a large margin of high-minded, of brave and of responsible statesmanship, which we have to traverse, and, God willing, we hope that the interests of the British Empire, its dignity and its high

<sup>16</sup> *Servant of India*, April 3, 1924, p. 97.

mission in the world, in which I still have faith, disappointed as I have been sorely in one or two matters, that these will still be maintained while we traverse that margin."<sup>17</sup>

The Government of India, including its Indian members, replied that resignation would serve no good purpose and would amount only to a cowardly retreat from the problem. In an article published in the *Servant of India* Sastri denied this contention and gave several instances of ministers in Responsible Governments resigning when they found that grave wrongs had defied the ordinary treatment and cried out for some extraordinary remedy. He wished that the Government of India might create a convention of responsibility to the Indian Legislature, notwithstanding the Constitution.<sup>18</sup> Sastri was still confident that if the Government of India resigned, the conscience of the British people would be roused to such a pitch that they would not sanction colour bar in colonies like Kenya. Then South Africa would be morally isolated. India should be left free to deal with her, and to that purpose, if none else, India should be given Dominion Status. He then made the then novel suggestion that the League of Nations should be invoked. He said:

"India should be allowed freedom to examine the possibilities of the Covenant of the League of Nations in order to bring the conduct of South Africa before the bar of the world's public opinion, seeing that the 'lesser league of nations' has confessed its impotence to deal with such internal squabbles."

Sastri was greatly disappointed that practically none of his suggestions for giving forceful yet constitutional expression to India's resentment of the Kenya decision was adopted, except public meetings. Not even the British Empire Exhibition in London in April, 1924, was officially boycotted by the Government of India. Sastri, who was in London at the time of the Exhibition, however, boycotted it.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, March 27, 1924, p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, April 10, 1924, p. 112.

## THE NATIONAL DEMAND

IN December, 1923, Mr. S. Kasturiranga Aiyengar, the Editor of *The Hindu* of Madras, passed away. Sastri wrote an appreciation of him, who had been his bitter critic. In giving him due praise Sastri said: "A notable publicist, powerful editor and dutiful son of India passed away the other day in the person of Mr. Kasturiranga Aiyengar. Proud and sensitive, shy and retiring, he did not court public notice but his conspicuous office forced him, as it were, on the general eye." He then referred to his unfriendly attitude but did it with consummate delicacy. "I cannot refrain from alluding to the pleasure I experienced on reading his telegram of cordial welcome after my unfortunate Kenya mission. It was something, I thought, to be reconciled to this undoubted patriot after an estrangement of many years. It is a vain grief, one which it is no dishonour to own, that my ill health prevented me from visiting him and shaking his hands before his end." And he concluded: "Death closes all accounts. It is much to be wished that the sense of awe and irrevocableness, which prompts us to ignore the unpleasing and dwell lovingly on the pleasing in the contemplation of life which has just closed, should shed its beneficent influence even during life, so making public burdens somewhat less heavy and public duties somewhat more attractive."<sup>1</sup>

Early in 1924, the Labour Party came to power in England with the Rt. Hon. Ramsay Macdonald as Prime Minister. In anticipation of the event, Sastri suggested that meetings should be held all over India to congratulate the Labour Government and to express the hope that justice

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, December 20, 1923, p. 555.

would be done to India's claims for Dominion Status at home and racial equality abroad. He said that there was abundant justification for hailing the advent of the first Labour Government in England as an event of first class importance in the political world. India had her own reasons in addition. A deep kinship unites those who wear the galling chains of subjection. Labour had from the first leaped over political frontiers and gloried in international affinities. The only active parliamentary committee which interested itself in Indian affairs at the time consisted almost entirely of Labour members. Exclusion from the careers open to the governing classes in Britain and the Empire at large predisposed them to be friends of India's political emancipation and champions of her nationalist programme. Ramsay Macdonald was Chairman of the Queen's Hall meeting in London on June 29, 1923, when Sastri spoke on England and India, and had said:

"When the time comes, we shall say to the Indian: 'Your country is yours; your Government is yours; your responsibility is yours. And we shall seek our justification, not in your continued subjection to us, but in your own capacity for Self-rule and Self-Government'."

The Labour Party's Election Manifesto had appealed to all citizens to "hold out their hands of friendship and goodwill to the struggling people everywhere who want freedom, security and happier life." At the same time, Sastri warned that it was easy to exaggerate what the Labour Government could do at once, since it was a minority Government and had powerful Tory opposition to face. Even so, India should mark her gratification at the success of those who had always been friendly, and who in the dark hour of despair had spoken words of comfort and hope.

The Labour Government was not able to fulfil India's high expectations at the time only because it was in office for too short a time. A subsequent Labour Government, that of Mr. Clement Attlee, conferred Independence on India in 1947, while Churchill had declared that he had not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of his Empire.

Sastri had come to Poona for the session of the National Liberal Federation during the Christmas week, and had

stayed on. About 9 p.m. on January 12, 1924, he was suddenly called to see Mahatma Gandhi at the Sassoon Hospital. Gandhi, who had been in the Yervada Jail and had developed symptoms of appendicitis, was removed to the hospital as an immediate operation was considered essential. He was asked by the attending doctors if he wished to see anybody before he was put under chloroform. He wished to see Sastri if he was in town, along with two others. After returning from the hospital about midnight, Sastri dictated a statement of what happened. In the course of it, he said:

"On my entering the room we greeted each other and I enquired how he felt as to the operation. He answered firmly that the doctors had come to a definite conclusion and he was content to abide by it, and in reply to further enquiry he said he had full confidence in the medical men about him and that they had been very kind and very careful. Should there arise any public agitation, he added, then it should be made known that he had no complaint whatever to make against the authorities and that so far as the care of his body went, their treatment left nothing to be desired. . . .

"I then pressed him again for a message to his people, his followers or the country. He was surprisingly firm on this subject. He said he was a prisoner of Government and he must observe the prisoner's code of honour scrupulously. He was supposed to be civilly dead. He had no knowledge of outside events and he could not have anything to do with the public; he had no message.

"How is it, then, that Mr. Mohammed Ali communicated a message as from you the other day?" The words were scarcely out of my mouth when I regretted them. But recall was impossible. He was obviously astonished at my question and exclaimed: 'Mr. Mohammed Ali? A message from me?' Luckily at this point the nurse came with some articles of apparel and signalled me to depart. In a few minutes he was shifted to the operation room. I sat outside marvelling at the exhibition I had witnessed of high-mindedness, forgiveness, chivalry and love, transcending ordinary human nature, and what a mercy it was that the Non-cooperation movement should have had a leader of such serene vision and sensitiveness to honour."<sup>2</sup>

A week after, on January 19, 1924, the Deccan Sabha of

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, January 17, 1924, p. 604.

Poona considered the question of the release of the Mahatma. Some of the leading members were against it, while Sastri and others were in favour. Though the latter had a majority, it was so small that no resolution was passed. Sastri felt "very depressed."<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the message to the public which Mohammed Ali had attributed to the Mahatma, there were some telegraphic exchanges between him and Sastri about January 22, 1924, and on the next day Mohammed Ali sent a telegram to Sastri apologising that he had been unable to recall his statement because the censor had delayed the cancelling message.<sup>4</sup>

The political situation in the beginning of 1924 was rather complicated. Lord Olivier had become the Secretary of State for India in the Labour Government in London. While sympathetic to Indian aspirations for self-government, he pleaded for time to win the support of the British Parliament and the British element in India, official and non-official, for the purpose and in the meanwhile asked for the hearty cooperation of India in making the current reforms a success. The Liberals, who were realists, were agreeable. The Gandhian Congressmen stuck to their Non-cooperation and boycotted the legislatures. The Swarajists entered them with the professed object of non-cooperating from within and wrecking the Constitution. The Government of India offered a committee to examine the actual working of the reforms and to suggest improvements but within the existing frame. Some Indian leaders preferred a Royal Commission, mentioned by the British Government, to recommend further reforms; some others, particularly the Swarajists, demanded a Round Table Conference of British and Indian representatives so as to provide an element of self-determination as well as British cooperation; some others still, particularly Mrs. Besant, preferred a National Convention, consisting only of Indians, to frame a constitution for India and present it to the British Parliament for ratification as it would be unadulterated self-determination. Some influential sections in the Indian Legislative Assembly proposed to throw out the Budget if their demand was refused by Government; others felt that it would only antagonise even the friendly Labour Party and Government in England and strengthen the anti-Indian Conservatives in the Bri-

<sup>3</sup> Sastri's Diary, January 19, 1924.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, January 23, 1924.

tish Parliament.

Sastri was very disappointed that the Swarajists, who secured a majority in the legislature of the then Central Provinces and Berar, refused to take office. He appealed to them to shoulder responsibility and get the best of the existing Constitution. He said to the Liberals, who had incurred unpopularity and odium without end and had been condemned as enemies of the country and denied not merely the amenities but even the opportunities of the platform, to take courage in both hands and beseech their countrymen in the Central Provinces and Berar not to pursue a suicidal course. "Our voice may not be heard, but it must be raised."<sup>6</sup> Sastri attended the meeting of the elected members of the legislatures, Central and Provincial, in Delhi on February 3, 1924, to discuss the National Demand which asked for full Responsible Government, including political, foreign and defence subjects. The Swarajists in the Assembly secured the cooperation of some non-Swarajists, like Jinnah, to support the National Demand, which was moved in the Assembly on February 8, 1924. The Swarajists moved an amendment in favour of a Round Table Conference, the members of which were however to be selected by Government! The amendment was finally carried by a majority of 76 to 48, much to the discomfiture of the Government.

Sastri regretted that the National Demand included the three subjects of Defence, Political and Foreign Departments, which was an "unnecessary and mischievous encumbrance" and was an embarrassment to the matter-of-fact negotiator with Government. On the other hand, Government need not have drawn a distinction between "Responsible Government" and "Dominion Status" and taken up a *non-possumus* attitude. The Government, after the first enthusiasm in the working of the reforms, cried "halt" apparently under the influence of the late Tory Government in England. In consequence, a rooted distrust had seized hold of the Indian politician's mind, and it was only tangible action that could cure it. The newly formed Nationalist Party intended to refuse supplies and adopt general obstruction if Government failed to make a satisfactory response. As the Labour Party was new to office, Sastri pleaded that it had a claim on India's patience and

<sup>6</sup> *Servant of India*, January 24, 1924.

courtesy. He suggested that a deputation should proceed to England and negotiate with the new Secretary of State before the Cabinet gave its final answer. If a deputation did go forward, as he earnestly hoped it would, it would find its hand weakened, almost handicapped, if the Assembly had refused supplies and started obstruction. Nothing much was lost by postponing such action by a few months, so that the Labour Party might not complain that between the Indian Government and the Indian politicians they had not had fair play.

Sastri's advice was not accepted by the Nationalists. They threw out the first three "Demands for Grants" in the Budget, but passed the others. The Assembly refused to "take into consideration" the Finance Bill. When the Bill was again presented with the Governor-General's recommendation, the Assembly refused leave for its introduction! On March 24, 1924, it was presented in the Council of State with both the "recommendation" and the "certification" of the Governor-General. As desired by the Government, the Bill was passed by the Council unanimously and without amendments the next day. Sastri, in giving his support, made it clear that, while he was in favour of ordered progress, the constitutional advance demanded in the Assembly should have been accepted by Government, subject to the reservation of Defence, Foreign and Political Departments. He was not in favour of advance by slow and numerous steps. He feared that the rejection of the Bill by the Assembly had embarrassed the Labour Government. By passing the Bill unanimously and without amendments, the Council would counteract to some extent the undesirable effects of the action of the Assembly.

While Sastri was opposed to the rejection of the Budget and the Finance Bill, some Liberals in the Assembly had, after putting up a struggle for a long while, joined the Swarajists in rejecting it, and were in consequence criticised for violation of party discipline. Sastri pleaded for tolerance of their action, for the special circumstances of the case justified the exercise of independent judgment. He did not approve of their action, but he was not prepared to convict them of indiscipline or apostasy, as some other Liberals did. Eager natures were bound to recoil from regulation standards of action and go a little beyond the border line when they found the really bold and progressive programme of



Liberalism was handicapped in execution by excessive timorousness or consideration for the susceptibilities of the powers that be. The malady of the Liberal Party was deeper than some of them were willing to believe. Events had moved on in their heedless way and left the old Liberalism a little behind. Instead of keeping in step with the rest of the world, the orthodox champions of the creed would, if they could, begin to cast out the heretics, preferring the straight and narrow doctrine to a truer apprehension of the environment and a wider comprehension of the energy and patriotism all around. In this they seemed to reproduce with excessive fidelity the old ceremonial spirit of caste which continually drew its boundaries closer in the never-ending pursuit of an imaginary purity. In England, Liberalism and Socialism and, in fact, every other school of social and political thought that had taken a name and individual form, had never been the same from decade to decade. Indian Liberals, as a definite party, had many things to learn. Let them not so soon erect a stake for the heretics amongst them. They were too few to divide further. Tolerance, not rigidity of faith, should be their motto; great, not less, response to the hurrying forces around should be their aim. Some years later, when the word "Liberal" had become unpopular, Sastri suggested that the name should be exchanged for a more appealing one. But his suggestion was not accepted. Instead, the Liberals, as a party, died a lingering death, unwept, unhonoured and unsung.

Sastri was in London from May 10 to July 31, 1924, as a member of an Indian Delegation. Though handicapped by low health, he met a large number of influential statesmen with the twin objectives of promoting constitutional advance in India and securing equality of status for Indians in the British Empire. He interviewed the Labour Secretary of State for India, Lord Olivier. He addressed a crowded meeting in Bradford and explained that India was following the British example in demanding Dominion Status and that the rejection of the Budget was a mild imitation of the British precedent of refusing supplies until political demands were met.

Lord Olivier, though a member of the Labour Cabinet, made a speech at Oxford in which he repudiated the right of Indians to immediate self-determination and recommended the adoption by them of Fabian tactics. Sastri, along with

some others, promptly submitted a memorandum to the India Office vindicating India's right to self-determination and the right to write her own constitution and warning against the step-by-step theory of political advance. It pointed out that the safety of the connection between India and England depended on the establishment of Dominion Home Rule in India as quickly as possible. Otherwise, the constitutional party would be destroyed and people driven to despair. Certain reservations regarding defence, etc., were inevitable as temporary expedients even in a constitution written entirely by Indians. Such reservations should follow self-determination and not be a precedent condition to it.

On May 27, 1924, the Report of the Public Services Commission, presided over by Lord Lee, was published. The same evening Sastri addressed a meeting of the British Auxiliary of the National Conference of India in London and referred to some of the chief recommendations of the Commission on merits and in relation to the self-government of India. The Government of India were, it was well understood, opposed to the appointment of the Commission as Sastri had anticipated when it was announced. The Indian political parties were also opposed, and the Indian Legislative Assembly refused to vote funds for the Commission. But, at the command of the Secretary of State, the Governor-General secured the funds by "certification." The appointment of the Commission under such circumstances had embittered India; its recommendations served to aggravate it. In assessing the Report, Sastri welcomed the recommendation for the appointment of a Public Services Commission, which was already provided for in the Montagu Act of 1919 but not implemented. The Commission had proceeded on the presumption that no constitutional advance was contemplated and that the British Secretary of State for India would not relax his control over the Government of India and would have to recruit British personnel to the superior services in India and guarantee them salaries and amenities which would be attractive to them. The extra financial burden proposed by the Commission was about a crore of rupees a year! Sastri claimed that, in view of the unanimous Indian demand for speedy Home Rule, the recruitment and control of the services in India should be transferred to the Government of India who would recruit Indians as far as possible and others from all

over the world where necessary, particularly in the technical and scientific services. India should increasingly run her own services. He then referred to the impact of the Lee Recommendations on the unity of the Commonwealth. There was no considerable school of politicians in India, even that over which Mahatma Gandhi presided, which wished to take India outside the British Empire. This was an asset of superlative importance which no British statesman should squander. He hoped that in the future no political party or statesman in Britain enthroned in power for the time being would, by thoughtless word, by long-delayed action, by bitter remonstrance, dissipate that valuable asset. He then made an impassioned appeal for enabling India to be a self-respecting and enthusiastic member of the Commonwealth.

"I am speaking as a student of Indian Literature and History, as one whom a scholarly and eminent professor taught to value British institutions, to revere the Mother of Parliaments, and to hope that on the soil of India there would be a system of government built similar to yours but adapted to our needs, to shed on the many millions of India and their coming generations something of that material prosperity, that moral elevation, which is your pride to enjoy under your own constitution. . . . Teach me—I am fairly old now by Indian standards—teach me and the coming generations to honour and cherish the British connection with other feelings than pride. . . . Believe me, we are no longer proud of it because you have not yet assigned to us a place in the Empire which alone can evoke that sentiment of pride. That is the work of future statesmen. I hope that this connection, great in history and potent for the benefit not merely of the British Empire but, I believe, of India, will be established on a basis of honourable equality and reciprocal goodwill so that it may continue to redound to human happiness for ever."<sup>6</sup>

Among the main points that Sastri made in this speech was the abolition of the Council of the Secretary of State because it consisted of the "dearest grand-mammas in the world" who had long retired from service in India and lived in the past.

He was among those who addressed a crowded and

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, June 19, 1924, p. 239.

enthusiastic meeting in the Queen's Hall, London, on June 25, 1924, in support of Dominion Home Rule for India. He approved of the personnel of the Muddiman Committee, appointed by the Government of India, to review the working of the Constitution with a view to remedying administrative defects, but thought that the terms of reference were inadequate. The Provinces had Diarchy, under which part of the Government was in charge of popular ministers responsible to the legislatures, while the Centre was wholly autocratic and responsible only to London. Such a system was incongruous and would lead to perpetual friction and misunderstanding. When he left India it was widely whispered that the authorities there were quite willing to advance the Provincial or Local Governments to full autonomy, but were quite keen on keeping the Central Government unregenerate as before. He could not conceive of a greater blunder.

He recalled that in international bodies India had already acquired an almost independent status, but the Indian delegations were invariably led by Britishers, a retired Viceroy or a member of the Indian Civil Service, but not an Indian—an object of notice to the whole world and a libel on the intelligence and capacity of the people of India. This was possible because the Government of India was not autonomous and responsible to the people of India. There were matters like the distribution of functions between the Centre and the Provinces and the redistribution of the Provinces themselves which only a Government of India responsible to the people of India could tackle.

Sastri had a somewhat unusual experience in Birmingham when both Dr. Besant and he spoke and Dr. Haden Cuest was in the chair. Sastri noted in his Diary that while Besant was in top form, he did poorly, because of his heart trouble and the Chairman asked him to stop!<sup>7</sup>

Sastri and other members of the Indian Delegation had almost daily interviews with statesmen of all schools of political thought in London and in other places like Bath, Cardiff, Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool. Reuter's representative gave a luncheon party, which was attended by several leading personalities, in honour of Sastri. He addressed similar parties given by Mr. and Mrs. S. K. Radcliffe, Miss Maude Royden, Lord and Lady Lee,

<sup>7</sup> Sastri's Diary, June 27, 1924.

and met Sir Campbell Stuart, a Director of *The Times*, London, Sir Valentine Chirol of *The Times*, Lord Chelmsford, Lord and Lady Willingdon, Sir Frederick and Lady White, Lord and Lady Southborough, E. S. Montagu, Lionel Curtis, Sir Michael Sadler, Sir Gilbert Murray, Harold Laski and the Prime Minister, among others.

Lord Winterton, who was rude to Sastri in 1923, came up to Sastri at a party at Westminster Hall, shook hands and spoke nicely to him! Sastri was a member of the Deputation which waited on the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, and Lord Olivier, the Secretary of State for India. The former was very sympathetic, but the latter was less so.<sup>8</sup>

The task of the Indian Delegation to England was not rendered easier by the seeming approval by some Indian leaders of political murder and by the recurrence of Hindu-Muslim riots in India which the anti-Indians were not slow to exploit for their purpose.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, July 18, 1924.

*PLEA TO THE BRITISH IN INDIA*

SASTRI left London on August 1, 1924, and reached Bombay on the 15th. His strenuous work in England had considerably strained his health. He was so ill that he could not attend a reception at the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association, Bombay, on the 15th. He left for Poona and was ill there for some days. Nevertheless, he addressed a meeting at the Deccan Sabha on the 18th for over an hour and suffered all night with fever and heart-pain and could not sleep. Later, he went to Simla for the session of the Council of State, but could not stand its altitude and had to return almost immediately and proceeded to Bangalore for rest and recuperation.

The Hindu-Muslim riots caused such great distress to Mahatma Gandhi that he undertook a vicarious fast for twenty-one days in Delhi in September, 1924. Under the shadow of the fast the Unity Conference was held from September 26 to October 2, 1924. It was attended by several important leaders of all communities, including the Christian Metropolitan of India. The assembled leaders pledged themselves to ensure respect for freedom of conscience and of religion even under provocation. Sastri was invited to the Conference but he abstained, partly because of his ill health and partly because he was somewhat sceptical of its achieving its purpose. He wrote an article in which he said:

"No one who loved human nature or respects Indian national character will fail to be struck by the heroism and iron will of the Saint of Sabarmati which, recalling in some aspects certain well-known episodes in the lives of Sri Rama and Bhishma, lift the twenty-one days' fast and penance to epic grandeur. But are

people, under stress of an emotion variously compounded of hero-worship, responsibility for a great life and morbid anxiety to reach memorable results within a prescribed time, likely to be the safest judges of differences that reach down to the foundations of culture and religion?"<sup>1</sup>

After the conclusion of the Conference, Sastri commented on its proceedings in a message to the *Statesman* in the course of which he said that the adjustment of political and semi-political demands of the Muslim community with reference to the Swaraj movement involved subtler and more complicated issues. It could not be effected without the fullest cooperation of the European community, official as well as non-official. After paying a well-deserved tribute to two Britishers, the Metropolitan of India and Mr. Arthur Moore, the editor of the *Statesman*, for the "marvellous healing quality" of their contribution at the Conference, Sastri went on to say:

"Britishers have to understand that the fate of an empire depends on the choice they now make between the pursuit, as heretofore, of their own momentary interests and the adoption of a policy which, in communal, if not in individual, matters, is calculated to further the growth of a political nationality in India in place of the many sectional and communal loyalties which the law sanctions and British example stimulates."<sup>2</sup>

He followed up this message by a series of articles appealing to the highest and the noblest elements in the British character to help solve the communal problem and advance India politically. He was not sure that Hindu-Muslim tensions would disappear with Swaraj, but he was clear that they should not be a bar to it, and he appealed to the British to take an active hand in composing such tensions rather than take advantage of them. "History would perhaps refuse to support the charge that the Britisher in India actually fomented either religious or political animosity. To say that he profited by them was simply to say that he was human." On the other hand, British accomplishments in India tended to heal and reconcile such animosities. The great civilising agencies, the modern educa-

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, September 25, 1924, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, October 9, 1924, p. 421.

tion and the representative institutions that the Britisher introduced had a healing and reconciling tendency which could not be wholly frustrated by individual malevolence. But that tendency was passive. Sastri would have the Britisher take an active hand.

What was wanted from the representative of the British power in the future was not merely holding the scales, but active assistance in the work of mutual appeasement. His new rôle of guide, philosopher and friend of India in the path of self-government required him night and day to help in the removal of all causes that prevented the growth of complete concord. Otherwise, his justification of delay in political reform by the existence of internal feuds would be unredeemed hypocrisy.

Sastri was not happy to invoke such benevolent intervention, but he felt that it was essential for permanent peace and progress. It was a sad confession to make, but the sadness was lessened by the reflection that it was not the result of any inherent moral defect in the Indian people, but in great part the evil inheritance of a long course of ill-starred history. Unofficial negotiations would carry us far, but not sufficiently far.

Writing on "The Britisher in Indian Politics," Sastri pleaded for a complete reversal of spirit in the attitude of the British community, official and non-official, in India. Where they divided or benefited by a division, they must reconcile. It was not right for them to go the same way as before, leaving the Swaraj policy of Parliament somehow to realise itself. Lord Curzon had said that the British capitalist exploited India and the British official administered India, but both were aspects of the same process. Still it was possible to distinguish the one from the other. The official was the better of the two in their response to the political demands of India. Sastri handsomely acknowledged the good that the British institutions had done in India.

"Not only have standards of efficiency and thoroughness in administration been raised far above the level reached at any time before in our history, but the springs of public conduct have been purified, official probity has received a new meaning, public opinion has been taught and encouraged, in spite of frequent lapses, to assert itself, and whether between sexes, between capital and labour, or between teacher and pupil, a nobler and



more chivalrous relation has been established, beyond danger, let us hope, of being forgotten when Britain's hand is withdrawn from the helm. Who, again, would hesitate to acknowledge handsomely the awakening of the social conscience towards the servile and depressed classes as a result of Western ideals? Why, the national ambition, of which the intensity is proving a serious embarrassment to the Government, is itself the product of English education. . . . Our tale of indebtedness would not be complete if we did not pay an unreserved tribute of admiration and gratitude to the loving devotion and heroic sense of duty with which many missionaries, teachers and officials from the West have laboured for the good of the people of this land and the unstinted homage and welcome of our hearts to the men and women of another race who recognise in the present distracted political movement the throes of a nation's birth and rejoice in openly championing the claims of those brethren among whom their lot is cast."

He then exhorted the British community to crown its high achievement by a higher ethic.

"It is this record, mixed, it is true, of lights and shadows, but hardly to be matched for general beneficence in the long and chequered history of man, which we would exhort the Britisher to crown by a chapter of pure unselfish work—that of renunciation. . . . The British population and the British army here ought no longer to consider themselves as the outpost of an annexing and exploiting Empire. On the contrary, they must prepare their minds for the new task of fitting the Indian people for democratic institutions by associating with them in the common duties of common citizenship on terms of equality, instead of maintaining themselves as a community apart, with interests and rights and duties of their own and a citizenship of their own distinct from and elevated above that of the natives of the land."

The superior position of the British community had enabled them to play the Providence in Indian politics for so long that the Indian intelligentsia had been left without the power of bold initiative and organised self-help. "The representatives of the British nation now occupy a position which, notwithstanding the decline of the last few months, can be truly described as one of unequalled prestige and arbitral authority. It is to the disinterested use of this rare

position, assailed but still not conquered, that we now call the members of the European community of India." At the same time, he appealed to the Indian leaders to make a radical readjustment of attitude towards the British.

"Good-will and ill-will must evoke likes. Is it too late to try a little mutual trust? Whether in the first instance or under provocation, certain of our politicians have indulged in indiscriminate abuse. We have insulted; we have bullied; we have threatened. We have been super-sensitive and too prone to see national insult and humiliation. We have boasted of our national virtues and capabilities, to which our claim is doubtful, and we have denied national faults and weaknesses which blaze as the noonday sun. We have allowed political hatred to mar social intercourse. We have invented a theory of Non-cooperation which should carry us to our destined goal in disregard and defiance of the Imperial Parliament, the British Cabinet and the Government of India. We have in the extremity of despair actually inculcated a spirit of disobedience and direct action which, while creating disorders and tumults and embarrassments now, is certain to recoil with terrible force on our own heads and expose our home-rule régime, when it is established, to the serious risks of continued and chronic distemper."

He pleaded that Swaraj for India should be universally accepted, and its achievement should be by peaceful and constitutional means. As a concrete step, he suggested that the European community should voluntarily give up separate electorates, which by their status, standing and influence and their organisation they did not need for their protection, and accept the common roll, with reservation of seats. Though even this expedient fell short of the final aim of oneness of citizenship, it still avoided many of the evils of separate electorates. "It is true that the essence of democracy was first ruined in 1909 when the right of the Muslim community to separate representation was conceded. Surely, it is for the European community to show the better way in India, not follow the worse."<sup>3</sup>

He instituted a balanced and withal charitable comparison between the professions and practices of the British community in India, who were in a false predicament.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, October 2, 1924, p. 411.

"Restitution and renunciation should be the keynotes of the community's future policy. These are, however, virtues difficult to acquire and practise for a people who have built up a world-wide empire. . . . While throwing open, on the one hand, the public institutions of the country to the depressed classes, they desire, on the other hand, to maintain white clubs, white schools, and, to the extent possible, white residential quarters and white services and white churches. . . . One of the best educated nations in the world, they resisted till the other day the introduction of free and compulsory elementary education in this country. Accustomed in their own land to guard the people against the encroachments of the executive, they find themselves here championing the executive at every turn, demanding for them not only greater emoluments but greater powers and greater immunities from the press and from the law courts. Professing to prepare the people of India for responsible government, they are by no means willing to abandon their practical monopoly of the military and diplomatic services, not even the main directive posts in the civil departments. Called by the new régime to teach the people to rise above all forms of communalism and weld themselves into one political nationality, they not only defend the existence of separate franchises and separate communal registers, but set a bad example by maintaining special constituencies for themselves and emphasising in most public matters their distinctiveness from the rest of the population."

Sastri continued: "Let us grant at once the extreme difficulty of making a complete reversal of attitude, such as is required when a community has to pass from frank domination to equal association. It is not merely a political but a moral transformation. Much time must pass, and we must exercise a large measure of forbearance and toleration in the interval." It was unfair to deny or ignore that there were individual Britishers who rose to their high mission. He appealed to the British to think nobly and act nobly, to surrender privilege and accept equality.

Among the Britishers who fulfilled the high mission was Montagu, who died in November, 1924, and whose statue Sastri unveiled in Bombay on May 14, 1925. There could be no doubt, he said, that the recent political history of India would have been very favourable to India if Montagu had been in power in Whitehall during the latter part of the War. He was sleepless over the question of Dominion

Status for India. He would lie on the watch for every opportunity of getting India in, wherever, in diplomatic or political matters, the Dominions were mentioned. He had so closely identified himself with India that he preferred to preside over the Finance Commission in connection with the Treaty of Versailles as a member of the Indian Delegation rather than as a member of the British Cabinet. He fought hard to secure the admission of India to the League of Nations and ultimately succeeded. But for Montagu, the public enquiry into the Punjab atrocities of General Dyer would not have been instituted. As long as he was in office as Secretary of State for India, the progress of his reforms in India was steady and palpable, but his resignation marked the dividing line between the success and the failure of Diarchy. Montagu was earnest about transferring as rapidly as possible ultimate responsibility for the governance of India to the Government of India by conventions. He had said to Sastri: "I must hereafter abolish myself." If he had remained in office a few years longer, he would have secured greater devolution of authority from London to Delhi. He described India as his constituency and sought to represent its wishes. He published the Viceroy's cable about the Turkish negotiations because he felt that India, as a Dominion, was entitled to give public expression to her views on the Turkish question, though it cost him his office as Secretary of State for India in the British Cabinet.

"There was no danger that he was not prepared to face, no opposition which he was not ready to brave, in pushing India's claims forward. Some of his personal friends and admirers have written to me expressing their profound grief that Indians have not realised the full extent of their indebtedness to Montagu. Alas! this is only too true. He neglected his position in British public life and devoted himself entirely to the service of India. It is sad that such a whole-hearted and selfless worker should have been insufficiently appreciated."

In his "private" letter to Sastri dated March 5, 1923, after his enforced retirement, Montagu thanked the Liberal Federation for its resolution appreciating his services to India, but regretted that his advice was not consistently accepted even by his admirers in India.

"One of the bitter reflections which I carry with me in my retirement is this: that I have always failed to get a consistent acceptance of my advice, even from my political friends in India; and the generosity of their appreciation of my services, which reaches me from time to time, is only measured by the frequency with which they differ from and reject my opinion."

Sastri was no blind admirer of Montagu; he had strongly condemned Montagu's consent to the Rowlatt Act and other measures of repression. "But let us recognise, on a calm survey of the facts, that our affairs are so disorganised and tangled that friends find it impossible to do us good without at the same time doing some harm. It seems the price exacted of all reformers." Of his personal relations with Montagu, Sastri said: "Our interviews in London were frequent. As soon as I appeared in his office, he would draw a big chair near the fireplace, and with his large long legs sprawling about and crossing and recrossing each other frequently, would motion me to the sofa near and start talking on all subjects under the sun with such freedom and cordiality that, I assure you, I never felt that there was a barrier between us of either race, status or official reserve." During their last interview, Montagu dwelt on the judge's criticism of his conduct as Secretary of State for India in the case between Sir Shankaran Nair and Sir Michael O'Dwyer, and "felt the sting of it—from the Indian point of view—and writhed under it like a man in physical pain." His parting words to Sastri were so tender that Sastri never recalled them without emotion:

"Forgive my talking like this. Everybody tells me that you are nowadays so dis-spirited that I must try and cheer you up. But here I have been talking for the last hour of nothing but my troubles and woes."

Sastri bracketed only two other British statesmen with Montagu: Burke and Morley. But Montagu was unique in some ways:

"It is the unique glory of Montagu to have cherished, from the beginning, faith in the capacity of the people of India to bear the burden of Responsible Government. His liberalism possessed the rare quality of courage and comprehended Asiatics in

its range. He had bold plans for binding India to the Commonwealth of Great Britain. He devoted his great talent solely for the furtherance of these plans and did not hesitate when the time came to sacrifice himself in the cause. Whether we test his record by intention or measure it by actual achievement, he stands a clear head and shoulders above all other benefactors of India. Here was a Montagu; when comes such another?"

## UNITED FRONT

THE political situation had, after Montagu's resignation, developed into what Sastri said was a "natural and inevitable" tragedy, for which no party in particular could be blamed but which nevertheless meant unmerited suffering for the innocent people. Deshabandhu C. R. Das, who was in the ascendant, particularly in Bengal, admitted that "anarchical crime" was spreading and had thereby provided "the clearest and most unambiguous justification for repressive action by Government." He proposed to proceed with civil disobedience all the same, but, unlike Mahatma Gandhi, would take no responsibility if violence broke out! He was, however, willing to accept delay and stages in political reconstruction, provided the onward course was laid out beyond doubt by agreement between British and Indian statesmen. Sastri approved of the constructive part of the policy of Das.

He supported the views of Sir Chimanlal Setalvad when he demanded that Diarchy in the Provinces should go and the Central Government should be made responsible to the Central Legislature as far as possible. He was particularly pleased that Sir Chimanlal denounced the policy and practice of Sir George Lloyd, "that pocket edition of Lord Curzon," from inside knowledge, for Sir Chimanlal was a member of the Executive half of the Bombay Government under the Governorship of Sir George. Sastri distinguished Sir Chimanlal from other Liberals. "Like all Liberals, he [Sir Chimanlal] gave expression on all possible occasions to disapprobation of the Non-cooperation Movement. But unlike most Liberals, he refused to qualify his disapprobation by a personal laudation of the Mahatma." Sastri was

among the "most Liberals"!

In an article on "Repression in Bengal," Sastri reiterated his view that reform, and not repression, was the better way to deal with anarchical crime in Bengal. He sorrowfully admitted a fall in his faith that India's political progress would be secured with peace and harmony and without violence. What the British Parliament promised, the bureaucracy in India denied and gave room for the conviction among the more ardent Indian politicians that political advance could be extracted from the bureaucracy only through violence and revolution. He noticed a desire on the part of Government to "teach a lesson to the people." to indulge in frightfulness. The average Britisher in India thought the Indian politician was an ill-conditioned mal-content. Even a British judge of an Indian High Court did not realise the implications of the Rowlatt Act, which Sastri had denounced as the "unblest mother of a monstrous brood of evil." He thought that the Act gave Government no power to detain persons indefinitely and never to bring them to justice! When Sastri assured him that it did, the British judge "stared for a second, drew out his watch and remembered a pressing engagement!"<sup>1</sup>

Very unusual for him, Sastri had a fling at Sir Muhammad Shafi and Sri B. N. Sarma, who had, as non-officials, strenuously opposed the Rowlatt Bill in 1919, but as members of the Government of India in 1924 were parties to the equally obnoxious Ordinance promulgated by the Viceroy instead of resigning in protest. The responsibility of office had imposed silence on them. And yet in truth, asked Sastri, why it should make a difference. He did not consider it necessary to join the Swarajya Party to protest against the Ordinance; his protest attracted greater notice because he did not participate in the destructive tactics of the Party. In a personal letter to Mrs. Besant, he gently protested against her support of repression by Government.<sup>2</sup>

Sastri reacted unfavourably to the invitation contained in a statement issued by Mahatma Gandhi, C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru for a united front of all political parties in India for political advance. The Liberals could not join because of the non-political, and therefore irrelevant, conditions attached to the invitation like universal spinning,

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, November 6, 1924, p. 472

<sup>2</sup> *Sastri's Diary*, November 4, 1924



compulsory khaddar and the suspension, and not abandonment, of Non-cooperation and Civil Disobedience. The joint statement claimed that "hand spinning is the best and the most tangible method of establishing a visible and substantial bond between the masses and Congressmen"! Sastri was not impressed. He wrote: "Is it intended that the overpowering necessity of universal spinning, which has not come into the consciousness of the masses, can ever be taught them as an injunction of daily practice by the classes to whom it is not an enjoyment, an economic necessity or an ancient religious exercise?" And with withering sarcasm, he added: "Those who do not care enough are to be admonished by those who care even less!" He dismissed the cult of the Charka as an aid to Swaraj as utterly inappropriate. As regards political objectives and methods, the Congress pronouncements were somewhat vague. Swaraj might be within or without the Commonwealth; the omission of the qualifying word "constitutional" left the method vague. Sastri recalled that Mahatma Gandhi had once understood Swaraj as Dominion Status within the Empire and a parliamentary form of government, and had recently declared that Civil Disobedience was out of the question. But one could not be sure of his next move. If Dominion Status and constitutional method be unequivocally accepted by the Congress, it would be possible for the Liberals to join it. Otherwise, they may be obliged to secede once again. He pleaded for joint action on the common ground between all parties, namely for Home Rule and against Repression. Some Congressmen, and S. Satyamurthy among them, congratulated Sastri on his suggestions and invited him to rejoin the Congress.<sup>3</sup>

Unity among the political parties in India for the attainment of Swaraj was the dominating preoccupation of political India at the time. The Congress leaders invited an all-party meeting in Bombay on November 21 and 22, 1924. The Council of the National Liberal Federation met on the 20th in Bombay. Since September, when he retired to Bangalore for rest and recuperation, Sastri had been pretty continuously suffering from his heart trouble. Instead of taking complete rest, he kept himself busy writing articles on current events and corresponding with friends in India and abroad. On November 18, 1924, he heard the sad news

<sup>3</sup> Sastri's Diary, November 13, 1924.

of the death of Montagu at the early age of forty-five. The event was a great shock to him, for his relations with Montagu were even closer than that of Gokhale with Morley. The shock worsened his health, and his doctors and friends advised him to stay in Bangalore. But Sastri insisted on attending the Liberal Federation Council as well as the All-Parties Conference. He was, however, too late for the first but attended the second, and was persuaded to preside over its sessions on the 22nd. There was sharp difference of opinion regarding the Bengal Ordinance. Finally, the Conference condemned it. It also appointed a large committee of representatives of all political parties, with Mahatma Gandhi as chairman, to draw up a scheme for Swaraj and for Hindu-Muslim settlement.

Sastri returned to Bangalore worse in health. He could not walk a few yards without pain and suffering and could not often relish food. But he continued to write to the press on current affairs, particularly the quest for Swaraj.

In an article contributed to *The Hindu Annual* of Madras, Sastri commented on the prospect of reunion in the Congress, whose annual session was due to be held in the Christmas week in Belgaum under the presidency of Mahatma Gandhi. He reiterated once again his plea that the Congress should in unequivocal terms accept Dominion Status within the British Empire as its current objective and not play with the idea of independence outside of it. In so far as Dominion Status included the right of secession, it was not a lower, and, therefore, not a humiliating, goal. Indeed, the opposition to Dominion Status among some Britishers was due to the anticipation that India would exercise her constitutional right to secede the moment she was made a Dominion, and they could not oppose it constitutionally. The invitation extended to the European Association and the Anglo-Indian Association to cooperate with the Committee would be rational only if Dominion Status was clearly contemplated. Once Swaraj was defined as Dominion Status with a parliamentary form of government, there was not the same need to restore the words "by constitutional means," for the words "peaceful and legitimate" would in that context mean "constitutional." The yarn franchise should be dropped, as it was absurd, irrelevant and fantastic, and Non-cooperation should be abandoned and not merely suspended.

Sastri ended his article with a brilliant and tantalising characterisation of the Mahatma:

"Mr. Gandhi rightly describes himself as a soldier. With a soldier's unquestioning faith in the justness of his cause, he combines a soldier's unquestioning faith in the wisdom of his campaign. His march may be hindered and delayed, but it must be pursued relentlessly and unflinchingly. He deplores the losses and sufferings of his side and has a tear to spare for the enemy as well. He will try to minimise them to the utmost. But turn back he will not. He atones his mistakes and failures in the only way open to him: by fasts and prayer and penance. When his account with God is settled on one page, he opens a fresh one on the next. He has often called himself a scientific experimenter. It is not his fault if his tools and chemicals happen to be human. Unfortunately, they feel and suffer, and the operator himself is as tender-hearted as any Sister of Mercy. But the laboratory knows no pity and needs no rest. The truth or *Satya* must be found. He seeks the guidance of God at every step. What more could one do! He is charged with a great mission and must fulfil it. The world must learn Satyagraha at its peril. In Germany and France, in Britain and America, in the Dominions and, indeed, all over the civilised world, his sayings and doings as the head of the Non-cooperation Movement are studied with intense interest as a new evangel for the future of mankind in the international as well as in the national sphere. His theatre encompasses the earth. History, far off history, is his only competent judge, after God. This, the present writer believes, is a true and just picture of the psychology of Mr. Gandhi. It is not drawn in a spirit of disrespect or with a view to pass moral judgment. But Mr. Gandhi's contemporaries, be they ever so puny, have a duty to the country as well as he. They may not see clearly; they may not judge rightly. But as they see and judge, so they must act. If they believe that in the search of highly problematical good he is bringing highly probable evil on their common motherland, they are bound to oppose him all they can. It is a comfort to know that he at least will not blame them."<sup>1</sup>

Sastri recorded in his Diary on December 24, 1924, a discussion as to whether Gandhi was more truly an apostle of non-violence or one of courageous conduct, and he him-

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, December 25, 1924, p. 557.

self took the latter view!

As anticipated by Sastri, the Congress at Belgaum shut the door against unity of all parties on a minimum common platform and adopted resolutions which were unlikely to impress the other parties or the Government. The Liberal Federation met in Lucknow, but Sastri could not attend it because of his ill health.

The continuance of revolutionary crime and the repressive action of Government created a difficult situation for people like Sastri. He disagreed with Mahatma Gandhi's view that the Bengal Ordinance was deliberately aimed at the suppression of the legitimate political activities of the Swarajists. Such an objective was expressly denied by the Government spokesmen, including the Viceroy and the Governor of Bengal. But the real difficulty which Sastri felt was that the repressive law was in practice not administered by the Viceroy or the Governor, but by the British bureaucracy, not in sympathy with the aspirations of the Indian people and too ready to resort to repression. He rejected the charge that Indian politicians did not care enough for law and order and indulged only in destructive criticism. He insisted that the gravamen of public displeasure was against indefinite detention or imprisonment exceeding three or four weeks without trial. The public resented, not the use, but the abuse of repressive laws. "When a citizen is deprived of his liberty to any extent, a limit must be placed on the period of such deprivation, after which the executive must bring him to trial."<sup>5</sup>

Due to continued ill health Sastri resigned his membership of the Council of State early in 1925. He was, however, engaged in collecting and collating material for a biography of Gokhale which he intended to write, and in writing to the press on current political matters.

He returned to the question of reunion of political parties on April 16, 1925, and pleaded that the Swarajists and Liberals should unite because their methods of parliamentary action were common, though the Swarajists were handicapped by their previous professions to destroy the Constitution from within. Having characterised the Government of India as "Satanic," the Swarajists felt co-operation with it was morally ruled out; nevertheless, they were in practice keen to accept office and make the most of

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the Constitution for the benefit of the people. But they were stuck with that word "Satanic," about which Sastri said: "No single word has been responsible for more crude political thought and action in the recent history of India."<sup>6</sup> He invited the Swarajists to abandon obstruction as there was no half-way house between unqualified obstruction and acceptance of office under the Constitution, and bring their profession in accord with their practice. Where they obtained a majority in the legislature, it was their duty to shoulder responsibility of office, as it was unreasonable and impracticable to expect the Swarajist majority in the legislature to maintain in office a minority party like the Liberals and loyally and enthusiastically support it. He also discountenanced the exploitation of labour and the students in political campaigns.

C. R. Das, who shared the leadership of the Swarajist Party with Pandit Motilal Nehru, passed away in June 1925. The country was convulsed with profound sorrow which found vent in demonstrations almost unparalleled in extent and intensity. Writing about him, Sastri said: "Coming rather late into politics, he simply stormed the citadel of leadership. While paying homage to Mr. Gandhi, he acquired in his own sphere authority scarcely inferior. He achieved the distinction, rare among Indian politicians, of accomplishing of set purpose the end of Diarchy in Bengal. . . . In some ways he appeared to stand midway between his colleagues, Messrs. Gandhi and Nehru. If he never soared into the serene spiritual height of the one, he always remained above the frank temporality of the other. . . . The title-deeds of Mr. Das to the worshipful reverence of his countrymen are complete in every particular. . . . Mr. Das stands before us transfigured into the *beau ideal* of the citizen and the patriot."

Bepin Chandra Pal, who at one time was a red-hot Extremist and who subsequently became an anti-Extremist and almost a Government-man, wrote in the *Englishman* of Calcutta that "the Bengalee Moderate, though publicly condemning the revolutionary, never refused to recognise that he helped him to win the Government over to his side. The political assassin paved the way to the Morley-Minto Reforms." Commenting on it, Sastri said that the accusation against the Moderate politician was uncharitable, but

<sup>6</sup> *Servant of India*, April 16, 1925, p. 123.

was such a mixture of truth and untruth that it was difficult to deny it at once and altogether. Bepin Chandra Pal, who was among the Extremists of the time, naturally claimed credit for the Morley-Minto Reforms. On the other hand, Gokhale and his co-workers considered them the direct fruit of their labours in India and in England. It was commonplace that no reform of a political or semi-political nature had taken place in Britain without some disorderly proceedings. Surveying the course of history for a long period, one would perhaps be justified in saying that, on the whole, less and less violence was required to bring the forces of progress into full play. The blessed day was not yet, however, within sight when discussion and deliberation **would** alone suffice to cure society of its evils. Among the agencies employed on the side of progress, reason and violence were inextricably mixed, and human ingenuity could not determine with precision how much of the resulting good and evil was directly traceable to either. Justin McCarthy, the historian, had said: "One of the sad defects of our parliamentary system is that no remedy is likely to be tried for any evil until the evil has made itself felt in some startling way. . . . We seldom have any political reform without a previous explosion."<sup>7</sup>

When Sastri mentioned to George Bernard Shaw that his mission in England was to secure India's political advance, Shaw cynically remarked that he had not heard of any breaking of British heads in India! Sastri recalled that Lord Willingdon had in his early years in India tried to persuade the British Cabinet to disarm agitation in India by a voluntary bestowal, by grace of the Crown, of a generous measure of political advance, but he failed. Gokhale's Testament, prepared in consultation with the Aga Khan and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, embodied his ideas which, if voluntarily granted, might satisfy the people of India at the time. But that was not to be.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah had announced that he was formulating fresh proposals for the solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem. Sastri hoped that a nationalist like Jinnah would not countenance the anti-national policies of the Muslim League, of which he was President, and make matters worse from the national point of view. Jinnah's hope that by compromising with evil he could limit it as a

<sup>7</sup> *Servant of India*, July 9, 1925, p. 267.



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<sup>6</sup> *Servant of India*, April 16, 1925, p. 123.

was such a mixture of truth and untruth that it was difficult to deny it at once and altogether. Bepin Chandra Pal, who was among the Extremists of the time, naturally claimed credit for the Morley-Minto Reforms. On the other hand, Gokhale and his co-workers considered them the direct fruit of their labours in India and in England. It was commonplace that no reform of a political or semi-political nature had taken place in Britain without some disorderly proceedings. Surveying the course of history for a long period, one would perhaps be justified in saying that, on the whole, less and less violence was required to bring the forces of progress into full play. The blessed day was not yet, however, within sight when discussion and deliberation ~~would~~ alone suffice to cure society of its evils. Among the agencies employed on the side of progress, reason and violence were inextricably mixed, and human ingenuity could not determine with precision how much of the resulting good and evil was directly traceable to either. Justin McCarthy, the historian, had said: "One of the sad defects of our parliamentary system is that no remedy is likely to be tried for any evil until the evil has made itself felt in some startling way. . . . We seldom have any political reform without a previous explosion."

When Sastri mentioned to George Bernard Shaw that his mission in England was to secure India's political advance, Shaw cynically remarked that he had not heard of any breaking of British heads in India! Sastri recalled that Lord Willingdon had in his early years in India tried to persuade the British Cabinet to disarm agitation in India by a voluntary bestowal, by grace of the Crown, of a generous measure of political advance, but he failed. Gokhale's Testament, prepared in consultation with the Aga Khan and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, embodied his ideas which, if voluntarily granted, might satisfy the people of India at the time. But that was not to be.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah had announced that he was formulating fresh proposals for the solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem. Sastri hoped that a nationalist like Jinnah would not countenance the anti-national policies of the Muslim League, of which he was President, and make matters worse from the national point of view. Jinnah's hope that by compromising with evil he could limit it as a

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, July 9, 1925, p. 267.

prelude to its elimination was not realised. He stooped but did not conquer. Sastri feared that if Jinnah stabbed Indian nationalism in the back at that time, tears of blood might have to be shed later on. It is history that Jinnah yielded more and more to communalism and tears were followed by rivers of blood in 1947 when India was partitioned.

In 1925, the Conservatives came to power in England, displacing Labour. Lord Birkenhead became the Secretary of State for India, with Earl Winterton as Under-Secretary. Though Ramsay Macdonald, the Leader of the Opposition in the British Parliament, had welcomed the Commonwealth of India Bill drafted by Annie Besant and her colleagues, Sastri felt the Conservative Government would not look at it with favour. He, however, saw a glimmer of a hope in Lord Birkenhead's offer of a Royal Commission to review the Constitution of India without waiting till 1929, when such an enquiry was due. The offer was conditional on the cooperation of all political parties in India in working the existing Constitution. It meant that the Swarajists should accept office in the two provinces of Bengal and Central Provinces where they had a majority in the legislature. Sastri pleaded for such cooperation. "I voice the sentiment of a considerable section animated by a feeling of comradeship in the service of the country and not without sympathy for the Swarajists' standpoint when I say that we look to Pandit Motilal Nehru and his trusted colleagues for an act of bold and even startling statesmanship at this critical hour.... The truth is that the Secretary of State's pronouncement makes no great change in the situation, but it furnishes sufficient occasion for my moral. So far as wrecking is possible, it has been accomplished. What seemed to sanguine Swarajists as the open highway to freedom is now discovered to be a *cul-de-sac*. Let us not pause to apportion blame, but find the way out at first. It is not heroism to persist in proved wrong. The country, not petty party prestige, must reign in our hearts."<sup>8</sup>

Sastri saw signs of hopes in the Faridpur speech of the late C. R. Das in which he had offered, on behalf of the Swarajists, to work the Constitution, subject to certain conditions. After his death, the Swarajists were increasingly in favour of accepting office, though they professed to do so to wreck the Constitution from within. But the trend

<sup>8</sup> *Servant of India*, July 16, 1925, p. 280.

towards cooperation was clear and unmistakable. C. R. Das himself had in a speech he made in Madras in 1924 declared that Mahatma Gandhi had "bungled and mismanaged" the negotiations between him and Lord Reading in 1921. He was confident that he would be more successful with Lord Birkenhead by asking for no more than what the noble lord was prepared to sanction at the moment. It amounted to surrender on the part of Das. After his death, the Swarajists offered cooperation, without formally abandoning Non-cooperation. Sastri regretted that Lord Birkenhead showed no appreciation of the changed attitude of the Swarajists, but gracelessly reiterated that Non-cooperation should be formally abandoned. At the same time, Birkenhead made two alternative offers. He would appoint a Royal Commission well in advance of 1929, or give "sympathetic consideration" to a constitution drafted by Indians. Sastri realised the difficulties of drafting a new and agreed constitution by Indians. He, therefore, preferred to fall back on the Commonwealth of India Bill, which had already been formulated by Annie Besant and others in India and which had received the support of the leaders of the Labour Party in England.

He defended his advice to the Swarajists to accept office on the ground that constitutional pressure on the British Government would be more potent and the administration of the "transferred subjects" would be more vigorous and free from dependence on the support of the official members of the legislature. Finally, he argued: "Even a partially popular government is better than a wholly bureaucratic government. That is the clear issue between the Swarajists and the Liberals." The Viceroy of India, Lord Reading, made a speech which closely followed that of the Secretary of State for India with whom he had personal discussions during his visit to London. The gist of his speech was that the British Government had no intention of going back on the Montagu Constitution and that the ten-year interval for the review of the Constitution was not sacrosanct, but that a Royal Commission at the moment was not likely to do much good. It also contained the warning that the British public would not yield to force or threat of it, but would respond to friendly cooperation. In his comment on the Viceroy's speech, Sastri wondered if it was not true

\* *Servant of India*, July 30, 1925, p. 304.

that statesmen hardly ever moved unless their hands were forced by serious breaches of the public peace. The recent history of Ireland, Egypt and Kenya proved that the merits of a case were not enough. India had lost her case in Kenya because the white settlers threatened violence while India rested her case on merits. "The elimination of disorder as an essential condition of progress in British institutions is as yet only an adorable dream." The best way to eliminate disorder was to advance India towards Swaraj. The whole of the Montagu Constitution should be replaced by a new one in which the successive steps of advance to Swaraj were automatic, without periodical tests of India's fitness.

At the same time, Sastri repeated his plea that Non-cooperation with the Constitution should be given up by the Swarajists in favour of cooperation like the Liberals. They might adopt the Commonwealth of India Bill or, if so be the general wish, frame a new bill, and so put the country again on the safe and well-tried road of peaceful and constitutional agitation. It would be found that progress was more sure and more rapid than ever it was before or would be under the newfangled programme of "delirious activity, executive high-handedness and repressive legislation, followed by despair, paralysis and mutual recrimination." Sastri granted that constitutional agitation might not secure *everything* connoted by the expression Dominion Status, but it could secure a great deal. The balance could be extracted by other means, if found necessary. But the probability was that with every accession of popular power the need for other methods would become less and less.

In the first week of September, 1925, the Swarajists combined with the Liberals, Independents and other non-official members of the Indian Legislative Assembly to carry, against the opposition of the Government, a proposition which asked the British Government to declare their intention to grant Responsible Government to India and to appoint a Royal Commission or other suitable agency to prepare a detailed scheme for the approval of the Indian Legislative Assembly and the acceptance of the British Parliament. The Council of State, however, supported the Government. When the British Government took the Council's view more seriously than that of the Assembly, there was talk of resignations from the legislatures and of prepar-

ing the country for a resumption of Civil Disobedience and also for the abolition of the Council of State because it stood by the Government rather than by the people. Sastri opposed the abolition of the Council of State, though its action had made both itself and the Government unpopular. It was not necessary to abolish the Council just to prove the obvious, that the Assembly was more representative than the Council. He disapproved of resignations, and, even more so, of the resumption of Civil Disobedience. Inasmuch as open rebellion was out of the question, and Non-cooperation had failed, the only sanction available was to try, try, try again the constitutional method. Sastri felt that Non-cooperation could not long be non-violent, and no Government, least of all an alien one not sworn to non-violence, would long tolerate a preparation of the masses to overthrow it at a given signal. If he considered the course of action wrong and disastrous, he could not just fold his hands and look on, while others advocated it and made preparations for it.

The drift towards cooperation gained momentum among the Swarajists; but it was still hesitant. They had a majority in the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces, but would not take office or permit any other party to do so. Nevertheless, they elected one of their members, Mr. S. B. Thambe, as President of the Council!

When the British Governor offered him a seat in the Executive Council, Thambe accepted it! He was, in consequence, threatened with dire disciplinary action by the Swarajist Party leader, Pandit Motilal Nehru. Commenting on Thambe's action, Sastri said that "he had done the right thing the wrong way!" He might have publicly declared his change of faith and resigned from his party before accepting the office which made him responsible to the British Government rather than the Indian Legislature. He was, however, opposed to disciplinary action against Thambe.

"A sense of humour will, we hope, save these critics from the odium of being the first to cast stones at one whose fault is that he saw the inevitable more clearly than his fellows and went further afield to meet it. In this world of delayed justice and posthumous recognition, Mr. Thambe cannot expect to be honoured as one who points the way. But is it too much to plead that he may be saved from the fires of the stake?"<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Servant of India*, October 29, 1925, p. 457.

Sastri pleaded in vain. The Swarajist Party roundly censured Thambe, and, in doing so, alienated other important leaders like the Rt. Hon. M. R. Jayakar who broke away from the Swarajist Party. In his comment on the Party's action, Sastri said: "The Swarajist Party will find that they have lost as much as they have gained. . . . Their morale is gone; their prestige remains. . . . It was the Berar Swarajist Party which hit the situation exactly. They disapproved of Mr. Thambe's action as against discipline, but recognised that it was in their line of progress."<sup>11</sup>

Sastri was of the view that a sound democratic principle was violated when Thambe exchanged his Presidentship of the Legislature for a place in the Executive Council of the Governor. It was as demoralising as a judge or popular minister accepting an Executive Councillorship. The attitude of Congressmen was partly responsible for such departures from democratic propriety. While the Liberals urged that the salaries of the Ministers and Presidents of Legislatures should be on a par with those of Executive Councillors, Congressmen pitched their salaries much lower, so that from the monetary point of view they were less attractive, and made impossible drafts on the patriotism and self-sacrifice of ministers. It was self-defeating. In view of the poor resources of India, a general lowering of salaries was permissible and desirable but not of ministers alone.

The Indian National Congress met in Cawnpore and the Liberal Federation in Calcutta. At the Congress, the venerable Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya made a heroic effort to bring the institution to what it was before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi and pleaded for reversion to cooperation if only because Non-cooperation had failed. But he was defeated. Mahatma Gandhi admitted that the fire and fervour were not there in the people, or he would recommence Civil Disobedience. The Congress took it as a challenge, and instead of abandoning Non-cooperation as warranted by the admissions of both Malaviya and the Mahatma, it proposed to rekindle the fire and fervour and prepare the people for its revival, if Government failed to respond! Government, on the other hand, sought the cooperation of the Swarajists, but insisted on their formal renunciation of Non-cooperation. Each asked the other to take the first step forward! Commenting on Lord Reading's

<sup>11</sup> *Servant of India*, November 5, 1925, p. 470.

speech to the Indian Legislative Assembly on January 20, 1926, Sastri thought that the Conservative Government in England was trying to lose time till 1929 by asking for cooperation from those who were sure to refuse it, while the Swarajists were professing that their cooperation was really a concealed and effective form of Non-cooperation!

Lord Sinha, who was the first Indian member of the British House of Lords and the first Indian Under-Secretary of State for India and the first Indian Governor of an Indian Province, pleaded for trust in the British. Sastri was somewhat critical of him. His own view was that politicians, British or other, were unlikely to fulfil their promises except under compelling circumstances. The Indian politicians should, therefore, create such circumstances. They should neither wholly trust nor wholly distrust the British politicians but must be awake and vigilant, since parties emerged and subsided and policies oscillated between renunciation and grab. "Since Montagu's fall, the worse type of imperialism is in the ascendant. I should have thought there was universal recognition of this fact in India, but apparently there are some among us who take a lot of awakening."



*KAMALA LECTURES*

WHILE taking comparative rest, interrupted by frequent writings and speeches on public questions, Sastri engaged himself in preparing his Kamala Lectures on the "Rights and Duties of the Indian Citizen." The Lectureship was instituted in 1924 by the Hon. Justice Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, a most distinguished Judge of the Calcutta High Court and an equally distinguished Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University, in memory of his beloved daughter, Kamala Devi, who died in 1923, at the early age of twenty-eight. He had requested Dr. Annie Besant to be the first lecturer. He had intended to invite Sastri to be the second, but died before he could do so. His sons informed Sastri of their father's wish. Sastri was in a dilemma. The state of his heart did not permit him to undertake the onerous task, but he had not the heart to decline it either, because of his respect for Sir Asutosh. Against the advice of his doctors and friends in Bangalore and Madras, he accepted the invitation, but secured the postponement of the lectures twice to build up his health for the assignment. A third postponement was not possible as the lectures had to be delivered during the academic year. He could not be persuaded to write out his lectures in advance, so that they could be read out by some friend if he was himself unable to stand the strain of speaking. He would not even prepare detailed notes, but had only a few quotations written down.

After a long and tedious train journey from Madras, he arrived in Calcutta on February 22, 1926, and was the guest of the sons of Sir Asutosh, Mr. Shyam Prasad and Mr. Rama Prasad Mookerjee. On telegraphic request from Madras, Dr. Sir Nil Ratan Sarkar, an eminent medical

practitioner, examined Sastri on the same evening and pressed Sastri to cancel the lecture that was due the next day and offered to do so himself on his own responsibility and telephone the press to publish the cancellation. But Sastri would not agree. Next morning, Dr. B. C. Roy, the eminent heart specialist, examined Sastri and exclaimed that he would not be surprised if Sastri collapsed during his lecture that afternoon! But that too did not deter Sastri. Whereupon, Dr. Roy prescribed some medicines and undertook to be at the lecture equipped for any emergency.

Sastri could not walk up the few steps to the Calcutta University Convocation Hall and had to be carried in a chair. Sir Robert Greaves, the Vice-Chancellor, was alarmed and offered to postpone the lecture even at that late hour. But Sastri would have none of it. Sir Robert took the vast audience into confidence regarding the state of Sastri's health and appealed to them to give up their chairs and benches and squat on the floor and crowd themselves as near the speaker's platform as possible to reduce the strain on the speaker. The sympathetic audience readily complied. As he was unable to speak standing, Sastri was helped to squat on the table in front of the Chairman. Dr. Roy and I sat next to the Vice-Chancellor, vigilant and anxious. Sir Robert introduced Sastri in a short and touching speech which moved the audience. There was pin-drop silence in the hall as everybody held his breath, as it were, to lend strength to the lecturer. Sastri spoke more slowly and deliberately than was his wont and was listened to with rapt attention. When he had spoken for nearly three-quarters of an hour, Roy gently suggested to him to stop for the day, but Sastri equally gently brushed him away and continued to speak for another half an hour, much to the anxiety of Roy and others. He took seventy-five minutes to say what he would otherwise have said in some sixty minutes. At the end of his Introductory Lecture, he was so exhausted that he had to be carried to the Vice-Chancellor's room and laid on a sofa. As the Vice-Chancellor and I watched in anxious silence, the doctor kept up a continuous examination of Sastri's breathing. Slowly and gradually, the breathing came to normal, and Sastri spoke a few reassuring words. When he was sufficiently recovered, he was lifted to the car and driven repeatedly up and down the Calcutta Maidan at high speed. It refreshed him. Immediately after,

an express telegram was sent to his anxious wife and friends in Madras that all was well for the day.

Almost the same sequence of events took place on the next three days. What he could have covered in three lectures, he did in four. After the final lecture, he remarked that he felt the relief of a student who had written his final examination paper! He was thankful that he was able to fulfil the wish of the late Sir Asutosh.

In the course of his scholarly lectures, Sastri took a comparative survey of rights and duties of citizens in several countries and, in particular, as laid down in the then German Constitution, and as they obtained in India at the time. He covered a wide range of subjects like the value and content of a Declaration of Rights and Duties, the repressive laws in India, racial discrimination in India and in South Africa, Regulation 3 of 1818, separate electorates and weightages to some communities, the denial of Empire citizenship and racial equality, the conscience clause in education, liberty of the press and the duty to vote, the right and the duty of resistance to the State and the rule of law and personal rule. The lectures were subsequently published by the Calcutta University in 1927. Mention may be made here of a few of their highlights, as it were.

Though England did not suffer for lack of it, Sastri favoured a Declaration of Rights for India because it would serve as a great instrument of political education and a standard for political conduct. He advocated that every person from his student days should be familiarised with it and be presented with a copy of it when he left school. Such universal instilling would help the citizens to resist promptly and effectively any encroachment on their rights. If the British people enjoyed better rights than the Indian, it was because the British citizens and the courts were more conscious of their rights and duties than the citizens and courts in India. Indians suffered also because they were non-whites and a subject people, and they had not the same traditions of individual liberty as the British. He felt utterly humiliated when the Indian Legislative Assembly agreed to the continuance of Regulation 3 of 1818 which sanctioned deportation and indefinite detention without trial, and for a moment wondered if it was wise to entrust greater powers to the Indian legislators who knew so little of their business. Resistance to the State was sometimes a

right as well as a duty. But it should be resorted to only in the last extremity and even then after considering not only its direct justification but also its indirect consequences which might be more dangerous to society. He doubted if the inherited tendency in India would, of its own accord, re-establish the rule of law if it were suddenly destroyed. The subsidence of the personal rule and the operation of the rule of law in all its majesty was a triumph of the British system of jurisprudence, of which India had only the beginning. "Let us not lightly part with this great gift that modern policy gives us, for it is then that the rights of the citizen have a chance, although we may have the best and the most humane of governments." He regretted that the best men of India had failed in their duty in the presence of revolutionary and anarchical forces then afoot in the country.

"If we destroy the present fabric, which is by no means perfect but which is capable of continual adaptation to better, finer issues, . . . shall we out of our own traditional aptitudes erect a similar fabric on the ruin? I dare not promise myself that, and that is why I hesitated and will hesitate again and again before I join any movement which has the tendency to overthrow, the tendency to disestablish, the tendency to bring about a state of anarchy in the country, the tendency which destroys law, the tendency which destroys order and ordered government."<sup>1</sup>

The Kamala Lectures were perhaps his longest and most sustained achievement in extempore speaking. There was no break in the continuity of thought in his performance. It was an unusual feat of confidence in himself. In its comments on the Lectures, the *Guardian*, a Christian weekly of Calcutta, said:

"Mr. Sastri was followed with rapt attention and, one can only say, deservedly. For rarely does the opportunity come to most of us to listen to so polished an utterance of so mature a mind, so generous a lover of youth, so qualified a man of public affairs who looms large whichever the stage, whether academic or political or social, whether Indian or Imperial or International—shining, not through any adventitious aid or pose, but by the

<sup>1</sup> *Kamala Lectures*, p. 115.

breadth of his knowledge of the world, by the scrupulosity of his fairness to foes and friends, and by the matchless poise of his judgment. Honoured by the University of Calcutta, welcomed to Government House, presented with an address by the Corporation, he ever remains true to his own deep devotion to Duty; through evil report and good report a genuine SERVANT OF INDIA."<sup>2</sup>

On March 3, 1926, the Corporation of Calcutta presented an Address to Sastri at an impressive ceremony. He was welcomed by a shower of flowers from overhead and garlanded by the Mayor. The Address alluded to Sastri's joining the Servants of India Society, his eloquent advocacy or rights of citizenship for Indians overseas and his courageous and persistent opposition to repressive laws and their repressive administration in India. As it was being read, Sastri had a bad heart attack and suffered much pain. Nevertheless, he managed to make a short reply. He recalled that it was in Calcutta that he was admitted to the Servants of India Society by Gokhale at a house in Ballygunge which even after nineteen years he could not pass without emotion. He would accept in all humility the Corporation's testimony to his public spirit in resisting repressive laws, and humorously added that when next he was attacked as a timid politician who had sold the interests of his country, he might be under the sore temptation to quote the unsolicited and spontaneous testimony from the Calcutta Corporation! If he was criticised for having taken the testimony literally and of having made "an illegitimate use of your complimentary address," he would take shelter behind a former British Governor of the Punjab who did not hesitate to quote a large passage from the fulsome flattery that he received when in office! As regards repressive legislation, he asserted that the Liberal Party, as a body, was not behind any other in resisting them and in upholding the rights of the Indian citizens which were "none too many and none too sure."

As per the terms of the Lectureship, Sastri repeated his Kamala Lectures at the Madras University, Madras, from the 12th to the 15th March, 1926. Writing in *The Hindu* of Madras, "Pavey Keito" gave his impressions of the lectures:

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, March 11, 1926, p. 65.

"The very first words of the opening showed that though the flesh was weak, the spirit was willing. The voice has not lost its charm; nor the tone its pitch and range. The silver tongue was more willing than ever, and soon the hushed silence that pervaded the hall spoke eloquently to the magnetic charm induced by the lecturer. Very soon it was borne in on us that even the English language could be so musical; even its periods so rounded. And on an abstract subject as "Rights and Duties of Citizens," as sentence followed sentence, we were overwhelmed in a flood of eloquence by the wealth of ideas and bewildered by the rapidity of their sequence.

"And yesterday in particular, in the singularly moving and powerful appeal for the absolutely indispensable asset of a Declaration of Rights of the Indian Citizen, who can forget the almost tragic manner in which he lamented the folly of the majority of the Assembly in Delhi who allowed Regulation 3 of 1818 still to disfigure and disgrace the statute book? The eloquent denunciation . . . was so awe-inspiring and moving that . . . they [the audience] sat in hushed silence, awe and humiliation."<sup>3</sup>

Sastri had occasion to pass some scathing indictments on some aspects of British rule in India. "But even these," said the critic, "have been rendered with that perfection of urbanity and sobriety of criticism so characteristic of him."<sup>4</sup> The Madras University entertained Sastri at a great and influential reception on May 1, 1926, in appreciation of his Kamala Lectures and presented him with a gold plate, and later installed his oil-painting in the University Hall and finally instituted a lectureship in his name for the promotion of Political Science.

<sup>3</sup> *Servant of India*, March 19, 1926, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, March 25, 1926, p. 103.

## SERVANTS OF INDIA SOCIETY : RETROSPECT

SASTRI received an invitation to attend an All-Parties Conference to be held in Sabarmati on May 5, 1926. Unable and unwilling to attend, he sent a message in which he reiterated his objection to compulsory *khaddar* which was "unwarranted by theory or experience and unfitted by its apparent irrelevance to the programme of the Congress to be erected into a condition precedent for admission to that body" and which was an "illegitimate imposition in an organisation purporting to comprehend all progressive politicians." Further, it was necessary to come to some understanding regarding eligibility, on the Congress ticket, of members of the Liberal Party and Independents as against the Swarajists and others, which was nearly impossible in view of their immediate past history. He held that the acceptance of office under the Reforms was a door to honourable service to the public and not a step to be explained and apologised for, or be dependent on the arbitral decision of two or three individuals. He was willing to accept that Civil Disobedience was practically abandoned even without formal renunciation. He wished that the reconciliation between the political parties was based on "simple and intelligible agreements," and added: "Being a man of peace, I am not attracted to the idea of re-entering the Congress as a disaffected minority with the prospect of conducting an internecine struggle of indefinite duration for the purpose of becoming the majority."

On May 25, 1926, a disastrous fire broke out in the Arya Bhushan Press, Poona, which belonged to the Servants of India Society and whose profits helped to finance its work. More disastrous than the loss of property was the destruc-

tion of the nearly-ready biography of Gokhale and its basic materials, which were irreplaceable. The future of the Society itself was in the balance for a while. Sastri issued an appeal for funds and wrote personal letters to some friends, including the Viceroy. He hesitated for a while to write to Mahatma Gandhi, though he could not explain the reason."<sup>1</sup> The Mahatma, in a note in *Young India*, supported Sastri's appeal.

In support of the appeal, Sastri wrote: "The Servants of India Society: A Retrospect," in which he revealed that Gokhale modified the objective of the Society at the instance of Gopal Krishna Devadhar. The first version contemplated only political education and agitation, while the second one widened the scope to include social and other service by national missionaries of India. Both versions limited action to "constitutional" means. Gokhale at first insisted on members, during their training, taking a vow of "absolute obedience" to the Head of the Society; he was persuaded to relax it a bit and prescribe that every member shall, during his training, place himself "under the entire guidance and control" of the Head of the Society. Gokhale had prescribed prolonged discipline and training, such as he received under his Master, Ranade, in order to evoke "qualities of idealism, reverence, courtesy, sacrifice and accommodation, which are essential in those who are pledged to mutual brotherhood in the task beset with danger and temptation."


In founding the Servants of India Society, Gokhale had held up the ideal: "Public life must be spiritualised." Some critics thought that he had prescribed an ascetic ideal and accused the members of the Society of having fallen below the standard set by its Founder. Sastri thought that the critics were mistaken. "Refusing to surrender all relations with Government and not seeking the jail as the only place for an honest man, we have appeared seekers of petty material advantages and lukewarm patriots in comparison with the adherents of a new school which erects politics into a religion and speaks of merit and sin where the common man would speak of expediency and in expediency." It would be audacious, said Sastri, to claim that the members of the Society, as a body, had lived up "even to the unascetic ideal" set forth by Gokhale. "It is not in the nature of an

<sup>1</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, June 1, 1926.



ideal ever to be attained, and all members of the Servants of India Society are imperfect, and some lamentably so. Our modest plea, however, is that we have not abandoned the ideal or deliberately set our faces away from it.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, June 12, 1926, p. 211.



## INDIAN STATES

SASTRI broke new ground when on October 3 and 4, 1926, he gave two lectures on the Indian States and Their Future at the Jubilee Celebration of the Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, Cochin. It was the first time that he ventured to speak on the problem in public. It was also the first time that a British Indian statesman of the first rank referred to the subjects of the Indian Princes, and did so in an Indian State. The Princes severely discouraged political agitation in their States and, more particularly, by their subjects, who had, therefore, to hold their political conferences, if any, in British India. Sastri was the guest of the Maharaja of Cochin, whose administration was among the best in the few well-administered Indian States and who enjoyed the loyalty of his people to a remarkable degree. Sastri's mission of stirring the placid waters of Cochin was a very delicate task. He rose equal to the situation.

He claimed that the British Indian publicists should be allowed the right to discuss the future of the Indian States because "what British India is to be, that more or less the Indian States will have to be," and the people of both were animated by the same desire to be citizens of a "common land under, if possible, a common government." He granted that the worthwhile ambition might not be realised at once; he would not force the pace but he would express the firm hope that it was "neither distant nor unrealisable."

He admitted that British Indians had hitherto left the Indian States severely alone. They concentrated their agitation to secure the political progress of British India against the formidable opposition of British imperialists and did not wish to fight on a "second front," as it were, by

extending their sphere of operation to include the Indian States as well. The British imperialists looked to the Indian States as their sure shield and bulwark to impede the progress of British India towards self-government, for they claimed that they had an obligation to sustain the Indian Princes, and that as long as that obligation lasted they had to stay in India and limit British India's political ambitions. Any agitation for political progress in the Indian States would be resisted by the Princes themselves, egged on by the British imperialists. Prudence counselled British Indians to ignore the Indian States for the time being.

Mahatma Gandhi had introduced a change. The subjects of Indian States were permitted to attend the meetings of the Indian National Congress and speak and vote on questions which came before it and which concerned British India only. But the Congress still eschewed problems that concerned the Indian States and their peoples but was content to admonish the Princes to behave well by their subjects and the subjects to trust their princely Rulers. Sastri boldly advocated that this policy should be changed. For too long in the past the study, scanty and meagre, of the questions of the Indian States had been misdirected; it was regulated from the standpoint of the few Princely Houses whose rights, privileges and modes of administration had appeared sacrosanct. The subjects of these States had been ignored. If in British India it was the wish of the people which was to be the mainspring of governmental action, even in Indian India the political aspirations of the subjects must be allowed to dominate all action in future. The Montagu Declaration of August 1917 had made a definite breach with the past, and British India was destined to have Responsible Government sooner or later. "I seriously ask you, subjects of Indian States, how long will you remain in a comparatively unevolved political system? You cannot if you would, and if some of you would, your children would refuse to remain in what has been to you a heaven of contentment." Even as the Montagu Report disturbed the "placid and pathetic contentment of the masses" in British India, so did Sastri's speeches in Ernakulam disturb the placid and pathetic contentment of the subjects of the Indian Princes.

Sastri reinforced the argument by declaring that British India would not be able to attain the full status of a Domi-

nion if Indian India continued to be a Dependency of Great Britain. Indian India would be a drag on British India. He admitted that the democratic evolution of Indian India would be more difficult than that of British India and hoped that no precipitate step would be taken either by British Indians or the subjects of the Indian States. At the same time, he invited the Princes to read the sign of the times correctly and replace personal rule by the rule of law.

"The Princes must withdraw steadily and surely from active interference with the affairs of their States as the sovereign in constitutional countries has done. There is no escape from that."

He warned that the enemies of India's political progress were active and influential and were doing their best to block it and making ingenious suggestions for the purpose. Among them was that British India should be broken up and the pieces handed over to Indian Princes, because they were more pliable and manageable! The position of the Princes was not enviable; they were under the thumb of the Political Department and of its representatives, the British Residents, in the States. The system made the fixing of responsibility difficult, for the Princes pointed to the Residents and the Residents pointed to the Princes and between them the poor subjects suffered. The Princes, who resented their subjection to the British Residents, asked for relaxation of their control. When the Government of India did so to placate them, a good many of the Princes deserted their responsibilities towards their people and took to expensive pleasure in foreign capitals like Paris. It was a mistake on the part of the Government of India to relax their control from above without at the same time replacing it from the people below. The situation was somewhat similar to what was happening in British India. The British Governors and their Governments in British Indian Provinces asked for the relaxation of the control of the Government of India and the India Office in London. British Indian publicists opposed it and urged that, to the extent that control from above was relaxed, it should simultaneously be replaced by control by the elected representatives of the peoples of British India. Otherwise, there would be irresponsible autocracy in British India as in Indian India.

Sastri warned the Princes that Britain, after conceding self-government to British India, was not likely to use its army to sustain the Indian Princes in their autocracy.

"The Indian States had better be warned in time. Our Rajas and Maharajas will find that the British Crown, having done full justice to its own Indian subjects, will rather sympathise with the struggling subjects of the Indian State than feel compelled by the terms of out-of-date treaties to raise their strong arm in support of medieval despotism. . . . Every State must make up its mind to have a constitutional ruler rejoicing in the growing citizenship and manliness of his own subjects. . . . That, then, is the destiny to which we have to call our Indian Princes."

After thus pleading for Responsible Governments in the Indian States, Sastri reached perhaps the most revolutionary and delicate part of his thesis, the elimination of some of the States. It was a proposition that was bound to antagonise not only the Princes but also their subjects and range them together against British Indians like him. There were, he pointed out, over five hundred and sixty Indian States, ranging from tiny principalities to big States, with corresponding populations and resources. Most of them would not be able to maintain Responsible Governments which were pretty expensive. It was, therefore, inevitable that some of the smaller States should lose their separate identity; there was no escaping that fact, though it was an awful thing to say. Legally, according to treaties and *sanads*, all the States had the right to survival but politically most of them had no survival potential. The Paramount Power was unlikely to be deterred by the treaties and *sanads* from abandoning the States if on other grounds it felt it necessary and expedient. He said:

"Have these treaties and *sanads* remained unchanged since they were made? . . . Will not the Paramount Power tomorrow, if it pleases, tear up these treaties for its own purpose—not for the purpose of the State or its subjects, but if it is necessary for its own purpose? I know no force on earth, no moral law that will prevent that happening. If, then, treaties and their articles could be changed for any one purpose, could they not be changed in the interests of the subjects of the States? What can be, I ask, of more commanding importance than the interests of the sub-

jects of the States? Nothing."

Sastri doubted if all the Indian States could be included in a Federation of India if only because all of them had not the resources to sustain similar Representative Governments. It should be left to a Royal Commission, which should include representatives of the Princes and their subjects as well as British Indians and the Paramount Power, to decide which of the States should survive as units in a Federation. Finally, he pleaded that in all proposals for the political advance of India, Indian India should not, as hitherto, be overlooked.

It is significant that the Indian National Congress avoided the issue of Indian India for some years even after Sastri espoused it. It was only in 1929, three years later, that the Congress, at its session in Lahore under the Presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, considered the subject but in a cautious way. This hesitation was largely due to Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who argued that the Indian States were "independent" entities under British law. They, therefore, restrained the Congress from interfering in the internal affairs and advised the peoples of the States to work within the limitations imposed by the Princes and maintain cordial relations with them. Even as late as 1934, Mahatma Gandhi advocated the policy of non-interference with Indian States, while wishing that the Princes granted autonomy to their subjects and regarded themselves as trustees for the people over whom they ruled. Nehru commented: "It is not surprising that even the mild and moderate Indian States People's Conference and the Liberals took exception to his views and his advice."

After his epoch-making speeches in Ernakulam on Indian States, Sastri visited many places in South India and gave public lectures and private talks on current topics, particularly the communal problem. He returned to Bangalore and engaged himself in sorting out the material for the biography of Gokhale. He was invited to accept the Vice-Chancellorship of the Annamalai University. But he had to decline it as he was soon called away to South Africa. In November, 1926, Sastri requested the Governor of Madras to unveil the statue of Gokhale on the Marina, Madras.

## SOUTH AFRICA

PERHAPS the greatest single challenge which Sastri faced in his public life was South Africa. Unwanted and un-honoured in 1919, he was the most wanted and most honoured in 1929 in that country! His stay in South Africa as Agent of the Government of India was described by the *Natal Advertiser*, a British paper in anti-Indian Natal, as "the brilliant reign of Sastri"!

Sastri inherited interest in the Indian Problem in South Africa from Gokhale and assisted him most actively in raising funds in India to help Mahatma Gandhi's Passive Resistance movement against the repressive policy of the South African Government. He had the honour of reading the address which the Madras Mahajana Sabha presented to the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Lord Hardinge, in December 1913 about racial disabilities of Indians in South Africa. The Address made pointed reference to the Indian Passive Resistance movement in South Africa led by Mahatma Gandhi against the Government of General J. C. Smuts. Hardinge made a reply which has become a classic. Defying conventions of propriety, the British Viceroy courageously expressed his sympathy with the Indian passive resisters in South Africa and administered a public rebuke to Smuts for his harsh measures in dealing with the movement "which would not for a moment be tolerated in any country that calls itself civilised." He demanded a committee of enquiry to go into the matter and asked that Indian interests should be fully represented on it. While Smuts appointed a commission, he gave no representation to Indians or to Europeans known to be sympathetic to them, but included some Europeans with pro-

nounced anti-Indian bias. Whereupon Gandhi and his followers took a solemn vow to boycott the Commission. Hardinge counselled against the boycott and sought the aid of Gokhale to intercede with Gandhi. Sastri was with Gokhale at the time and witnessed the agony through which the latter passed. When, one day, the strain became unbearable, Gokhale asked Sastri to cable Gandhi to say that he was accelerating Gokhale's death! Sastri knew that it was the extreme agony of the moment that drew the remark from Gokhale and not a desire that he should act on it.

During the First World War of 1914-18, Smuts commanded Indian troops in East Africa. In a farewell address in London, he spoke in eulogistic terms of the services of India to the British Empire in its hour of need and admitted her claim for self-government. In his reply to the address of welcome from the Indian community in Durban on August 26, 1919, the gallant General paid glowing tributes to the high civilisation of India "much elder than ours," admitted the equality of Indians with the whites and went so far as to say: "I do not look down upon Indians; I look up to them." He declared that "India should be given a large measure of self-government" and added, "I strongly supported the granting of army commissions to Indians." When it was pointed out to him that there might be the possibility of Europeans being placed under Indians, he said: "Why not? I would be proud to serve under an Indian Officer, if he were an able man." His championship of racial equality could not be more emphatic.

The Imperial War Cabinet discussed in 1918 the Memorandum of Lord Sinha, who represented India, on the disabilities of Indians in South Africa. Smuts, who was a member of the Cabinet, undertook to appoint a commission to investigate them. The Commission was appointed in 1920 and was presided over by Sir John Lange.

Early in March, 1919, Mahatma Gandhi, who was dismayed by the developments in South Africa, suggested that the Government of India should immediately despatch to South Africa a mission consisting of "a disinterested civilian and an equally distinguished Indian publicist" to avert "the ruthless extermination" of Indians in South Africa. Mr. H. S. L. Polak, a Britisher and a colleague of Mahatma

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, October 16, 1919, p. 433.



Gandhi in South Africa and the London correspondent of the *Leader*, Allahabad, had come to believe that Montagu had considered Sastri as one of the representatives of India to sit on the Commission.

There was some unfortunate misunderstanding and controversy regarding the personnel of the Commission. In London, on August 28, 1919, a very influential deputation of Indians and Britishers made representation of the grievances of Indians in South Africa to Montagu, the Secretary of State for India. In his reply, Montagu, who spoke with great feeling and eloquence, emphasised that the problem was not a domestic matter for South Africa but an Imperial one affecting the whole Empire, and that the South African Government had been requested to ask the Government of India to be represented on the Commission by two persons, one of whom would be an Indian official who enjoyed the confidence of the people of India. The British Colonial Office had supported the request and forwarded it to South Africa. Smuts himself had assured the Indian deputation in Durban that "India will be represented by members on the Commission to watch the interests of Indians."<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, when no Indian was so appointed, Montagu explained that he had said only that the nominees of the Government of India would be permitted to give evidence before the Commission and not to sit on it!<sup>3</sup> It would seem, however, that it was Smuts who changed his mind, and for the worse, from the Indian point of view.

When South Africa refused to include Indian representatives in the Commission, the Government of India proposed to send a deputation to put the Indian case before it. Lord Chelmsford, the Governor-General of India, proposed to nominate Sastri and Sir Benjamin Robertson, a British member of the Indian Civil Service, to the Deputation. South Africa, whose consent was necessary, imposed conditions which embarrassed and hurt Chelmsford. He took Sastri into his confidence. Sastri declined to go to South Africa. Chelmsford hesitated to send only a Britisher to defend the Indian case in South Africa, particularly when public opinion in India was hostile to the Government. Sastri undertook to assure it of his confidence in Sir Ben-

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, October 23, 1919, p. 446.

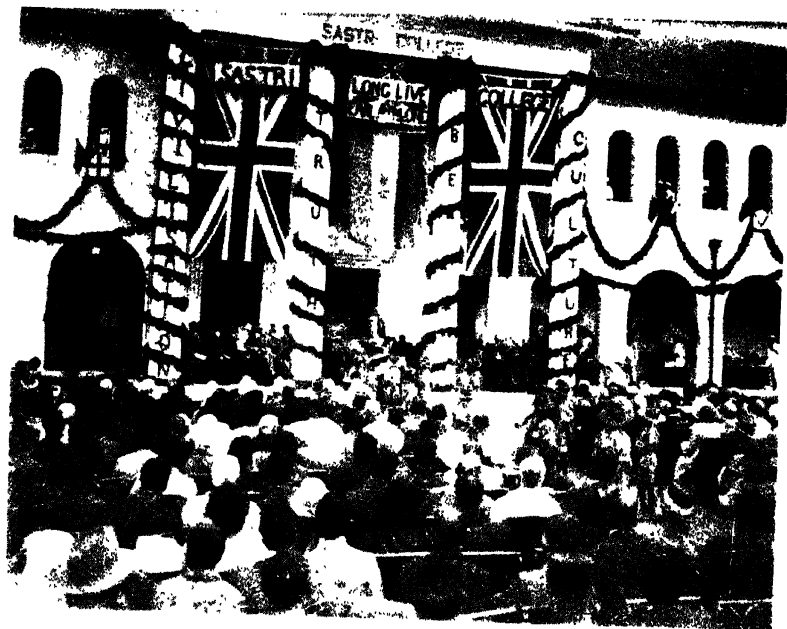
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, October 30, 1919, p. 457.



Round Table Conference between India and South Africa in Capetown, 1926 Indian and South African Delegations and their staffs (Sitting left to right): Rt Hon Mr KEMP (South Africa); Sir GEOFFREY CORBETT (India); Rt Hon. D. F. MALAN (South Africa); Sir MOHAMMED HABIBULLA (India); Rt Hon. CRESSWELL (South Africa); Rt Hon V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI (India) (Standing first row left to right) Sir G S BAJPAI (India); Mr SCHMIDT (South Africa); Mr. H N. VENN (South Africa); Hon Sir PHEROZE SETHNA (India); Rt. Hon BEYERS (South Africa). Sir GEORGE PADDISON (India), Sir DARCEY LINDSAY (India); Mr. PRING (South Africa). Rt Hon BOYDELL (South Africa).



*Round Table Conference at the conference table (From right to left)*  
HON. BOYDELL, (South Africa), HON. BEYERS (South Africa), HON. CRESSWELL  
(South Africa); HON. D. F. MALAN (South Africa); SIR MOHAMMED HABIBULLA  
(India), SIR GEOFFREY CORBETT (India), RT. HON. V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI (India);  
SIR DARCEY LANDSAY (India), SIR PHEROZE SETHNA (India), SIR GEORGE PADDISON  
(India), SIR G. S. BAJPAI (India)



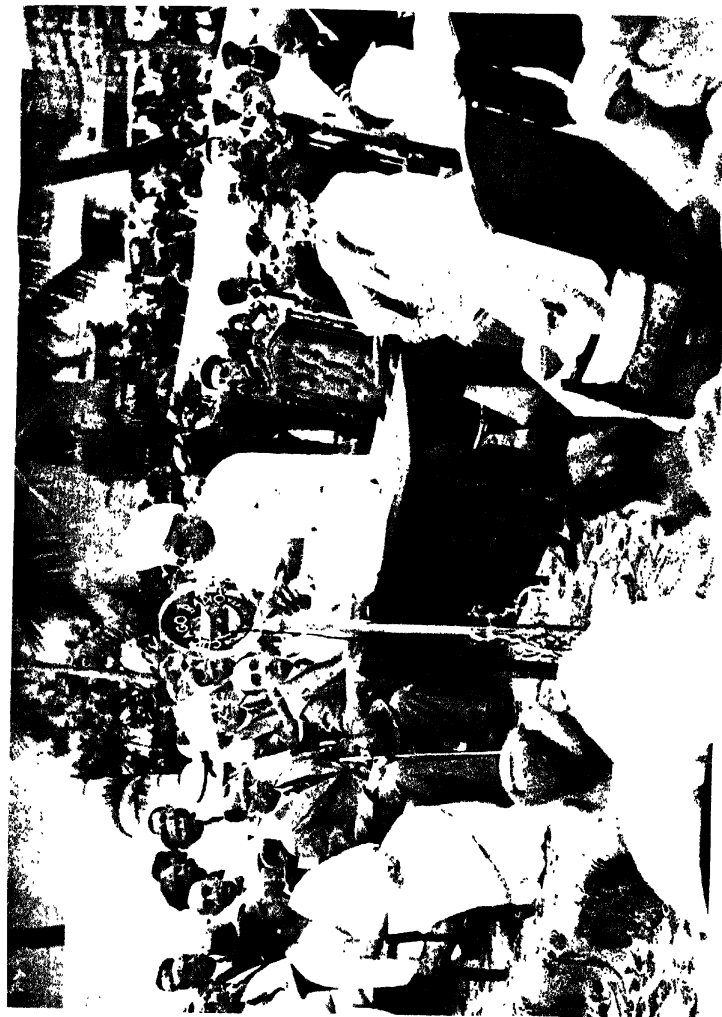
*Opening of the Sastri College Durban, by His Excellency  
the Earl of Athlone, Governor-General of South Africa*



*Sastri College, Durban, Natal, South Africa*



MR. SASTRI In 1921



Unveiling the statue of Sir Dushair Wacha opposite Churehgaate station on 9 April 1940. SRINIVASA SASTRI (seated on table), SIR HOMI MODY (third row, seated second from left), SIR COWASJI JETANGIR (seated at the right of Mr Sastri), SIR CHIMANLAL SETALVAD (seated behind table to the left of Mr Sastri), MR BHAUBHAI DESAI (seated first behind Mr Setalvad), SIR JANARDAN MADAN (seated second from left in first row)



26 Nov 1937

My dear Mirza,

Thanks for your letter.

I would anyway have written today to congratulate you on your speech in Mysore. Excellent in conception, diction — and force in effect. Gandhiji has come to your aid. So you are safe in part. Some of the fire is directed at him! Did you see how the students are insulting Jawaharlal if his advice does — to day:

coming on, no mistake.

Noted the warning you gave of your retirement. No wonder you are tired. But you are too young & too full of experience and wisdom. You can't be idle.

affly yours  
Srinivasa

Letter of 26 November 1937 from the Rt Hon Srinivasa Sastri to Sir Mirza Ismail, Dewan of Mysore, in which Sastri approves Gandhi's advice to Congressmen not to interfere in the affairs of Indian States and warns about the dangers of Communism



Private

Sr \_\_\_\_\_  
Coimbatore. 3 May 1934

Dear Friend,

I am happy and thankful that you think of me when some service has to be done for the good cause.

In this instance I cannot see eye to eye with you. I am really sorry, for I know what a delight it would be to work with you. The White Paper scheme is so bad I cannot bring myself to support it. The Churchillites won't give us a better, if they prevail in the struggle. That is quite true. But pardon me if I don't see the wisdom of hugging one enemy lest I fall into the arms of a worse enemy. Let them fight it out between themselves. My fate is sealed!

I shall be delighted, though, to have a copy of your letter in the Times.

With love as ever, yours  
S. Srinivasan

Letter of 3 May 1934 from the Rt. Hon. Srinivas Sastri to Sir Mirza Ismail, Dewan of Mysore, regarding Sastri's rejection of the British Government's White Paper on the scheme prepared by Sir Samuel Hoare.

Benjamin Robertson of the Indian case. In the event, Sir Benjamin Robertson's Indian opinion was much disappointed, and he was even criticised for failing in his public duty. Neither Chelmsford nor Sastri could at the time take the public into his confidence as to the reason why Sastri did not go to South Africa. Perhaps the first public reference to it was a question put to the Secretary of State for India in the British House of Commons on February 25, 1920, whether the South African Government had imposed conditions which were derogatory to the inclusion of the Indian gentleman in the Deputation to South Africa. It was said in reply that the South African Government had laid down no conditions which the Indian gentleman was not prepared to accept, but that conditions beyond the control of the South African Government stood in the way and there was no time to find a substitute. Polak commented: "Those who know Mr. Sastri will be able to read between the lines of the reply without difficulty and will realise that where he felt obliged to refuse, no other patriotic and self-respecting Indian would have felt inclined to accept. South Africa has thus one more sin to answer for." In a private letter to a friend, dated April 2, 1921, Sastri wrote:

"If I had gone last year to South Africa, I should have been subjected to great indignities. Sir Benjamin Robertson, who went and returned, says that the Minister who invited me to lunch or dinner would have had to wait on me himself, for all the cooks and waiters had resolved to go on strike."

It was only in 1923 that Sastri felt free to reveal the inner story.

"Lord Chelmsford's Government had proposed in 1919 that I should proceed along with Sir Benjamin Robertson to watch the Indian case before the Lange Commission of Enquiry, which had just been appointed. The Government of General Smuts would at first have none of me, but as my name was pressed by our Government, they stipulated that I should be warned that I would be treated only as Sir Benjamin's social inferior. In answer to further enquiry, they explained that, owing to the activity of the Anti-Asiatic League, feeling against Indians was running high, that it might not be possible to find me suitable hotel accommodation, that I might be subjected to indignities,

\* *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 158.

and that, if I accepted social inferiority from the start, I should have no right afterwards to complain of unequal treatment.

"Our Government protested against this extraordinary proposal and succeeded finally in getting my name accepted, but not without an expression of regret on the part of the Union Government that, owing to my association, it would not be possible to extend to Sir Benjamin Robertson all the courtesies and hospitalities to which the representative of the Government of India was entitled. I was by no means eager to drag down Sir Benjamin to the black man's level, nor did I consider it wise for one who was to plead for the equality of his countrymen with other subjects of His Majesty to begin by admitting his own inferiority.

"In the end I felt constrained to decline in the circumstances to proceed to South Africa as the Government's representative. My decision at the time brought hard words on me from critics in India and several expressions of natural disappointment from our countrymen in South Africa, but the entire correspondence between the two Governments had unfortunately been by means of secret cables which I could not then divulge for exculpating myself.

"What, however, was my surprise when General Smuts disclaimed responsibility for it in 1921! How could a constitutional Governor-General, I wondered, purporting to speak on behalf of the Government of the Union, have raised a tremendous difficulty of the kind without the knowledge of his Prime Minister? I tried to probe the matter further, but succeeded only in discovering that there were other things than the Partition of Bengal of which no one was desirous of accepting paternity."<sup>5</sup>

Lord Buxton, Governor-General of South Africa, told Sastri in 1921 that he knew nothing of the correspondence, as he was merely a post office.

Sastri met Smuts for the first time in London at the Imperial Conference in 1921 and, as stated already, was successful in persuading the Conference to pass his Resolution for equal rights for Indians lawfully domiciled in the British Dominions, in spite of the opposition and manœuvres of Smuts. Sastri returned from his Dominion tour in 1922, but no prospect was in sight of any of the consenting Dominions implementing his Resolution. On the other hand, Britain, led by Churchill, refused any kind of racial equality in

<sup>5</sup> *Servant of India*, November 15, 1923, p. 494.

Kenya, a British Colony, in 1923. In a fit of righteous indignation, the Indian Legislative Assembly passed, in spite of the opposition of the Government of India, a non-official Bill on July 27, 1923, the purpose of which was "to regulate the entry into and residence in British India of persons domiciled in other British possessions." It was defended by some on the ground that it provided for "reciprocity" which had been approved and sanctioned by a previous Imperial Conference, and was, therefore, inoffensive and unobjectionable. Further, the provisions of the Bill were not mandatory but optional; they gave power to the Government of India to apply them as and when they pleased. But others made it clear that the implication of the Bill was "retaliation," however feeble and ineffective in practice. The Government of India's opposition was based on the understanding that it was retaliatory and would hamper negotiations. The Bill, as passed in the Assembly, was introduced in the Council of State by a non-official. Here again Government opposed it, but when the time for voting came, remained neutral in view of the strength of non-official opinion. The Bill was passed by the non-official vote.

Sastri drew pointed attention to the fact that the Bill was passed in both Houses by the non-official vote—a rather unique event! He said: "I should like to see before this session closed this Bill on our Statute-book and the Dominions informed that at last it is the people of India that are legislating in this country. Then they would behave differently."<sup>a</sup> He also drew out the distinction between reciprocity and retaliation. The former applied to both good and bad actions, while the latter applied to bad ones only. Exchange of professors between two countries was reciprocity; exchange of disabilities and indignities was retaliation. He made it clear that, notwithstanding the appearance of reciprocity, the Bill was retaliatory, and retaliation was justified.

He was, however, too optimistic when he thought that retaliation would persuade the Dominions, and particularly South Africa, to take a more humane attitude towards Indians. He had opposed it before and subsequently also he opposed it when retaliation was actually applied in 1944 to South Africa. But in 1924 he had not recovered from the shock of the failure of his Kenya mission in 1923.

<sup>a</sup> Council of State, February 13, 1924, p. 193.

South Africa was not cowed down by the possibility of retaliation by India. For, about that time, the Government of Smuts introduced the Class Areas Bill in the South African Parliament, the chief effect of which was to segregate Indians in that country. The situation was debated in the Indian Council of State on March 19, 1924. A gallant Indian military officer suggested the use of India's armed forces to teach a much-needed lesson to South Africa! The Government of India pleaded for patient negotiation. Sastri thought that there was a wide area between begging and bullet that could be covered. He suggested that the Government of India, including its British personnel, should resign as a body. It would create a constitutional crisis of such a magnitude that Britain and the Dominions would take notice. But it was not acceptable to Government. The only alternative was direct negotiation between India and South Africa, as suggested at the Imperial Conference of 1921 by Sastri and of 1923 by Sapru.

The prospect for it worsened when the Rt. Hon. J. B. M. Hertzog displaced Smuts as Prime Minister. Smuts had a soft corner for the Empire, though appeals to that sentiment did not mitigate his anti-Indian policy. Hertzog hated the British Empire, and no appeal could be made to him to soften his anti-Indian policy in the interests of the solidarity of the Empire. On the other hand, the Nationalist Party, of which he was the leader, accused Smuts and his South African Party of having been much too considerate to Indians and promised publicly to solve the Indian question finally by the compulsory repatriation of all Indians! His Government introduced the Areas Reservation and Immigration and Registration Bill, which was even more anti-Indian than the Bill sponsored by the Government of Smuts before it fell. The outlook could not be more unfavourable. Yet negotiation was the only alternative left.

The ground for it was prepared by the visit to South Africa of the Indian Delegation of 1925, consisting of Sir George Paddison, I.C.S., a Britisher, and Sir Deva Prasad Sarvadhikary and Syed Raza Ali, with Mr. G. S. Bajpai as Secretary. It was followed by a return-visit by a South African Delegation which was led by the Hon. F. W. Beyers, then a Minister in the Hertzog Government. It included Mr. Patrick Duncan, Minister of the Interior in the previous

Government of Smuts.

It was finally decided that a Round Table Conference between India and South Africa for the solution of the Indian problem on the basis of preserving "Western" standards of civilisation should be held in Cape Town on December 17, 1926. The selection of the personnel of the Indian Delegation, particularly of its leader, revealed a difference of opinion in the Government of India. Lord Reading was the Viceroy and Governor-General, and Sir Mahomed Habibullah was the Member of his Executive Council in charge of the portfolio of Indians Overseas. Sir Mahomed was keen that the leader of the Delegation should be an Indian and not a Britisher, and proposed Sastri for that office. The proposal was opposed in the Viceroy's Council on several grounds. The Conference was between two Governments, and the members of the South African Delegation were members of their Government. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to appoint a non-official Indian as the leader of the Government of India's Delegation. Secondly, a non-official would not be as amenable to official discipline as an official and might create embarrassing situations. Thirdly, Sastri was a politician, subject to the temptation to advance extreme claims in order to gratify Indian public opinion. Fourthly, his record was not reassuring. In Indian politics, he was an Extremist in the guise of a Moderate. He had bitterly criticised the British Government's decisions regarding the status of Indians in Kenya, and was, therefore, somewhat of a *persona non-grata* with the British Government. Fifthly, he had bitterly attacked the policies of Smuts and the South African Government concerning Indians, and had antagonised them. Hertzog, who had succeeded Smuts and avowed a more anti-Indian attitude, was likely to be more hostile to Sastri than Smuts was. To appoint Sastri as the leader of the Indian Delegation was to court disaster from the very beginning. Further, it was desirable to include some Britishers in the Indian Delegation if only to impress South Africa that on the question of the status of Indians in South Africa, British opinion, both official and non-official, was at one with Indian opinion. It might, however, be embarrassing to invite Britishers to serve under the leadership of an Indian. It was, therefore, essential that the leader should be an official and a Britisher. All the requirements would be met if the Viceroy, Lord

Reading, led the Indian Delegation. Even Sir Mahommed would not then be able to press his preference for Sastri.

Whereupon, Sir Mahommed sought Sastri's advice in confidence. Sastri advised that Sir Mahommed himself should lead the Indian Delegation and realise all his objectives and silence his critics. Sir Mahommed felt reassured when Sastri volunteered to serve under him as a member of the Delegation.

But the critics were not wholly pleased, though they could not object to a member of the Government of India leading the Delegation. As Sir Mahommed was not brought up in the traditions of the I.C.S. and his tenure in the Government of India was a short interlude in his otherwise non-official life, and as they thought that he was too soft and well-meaning to control effectively a team which included Sastri, they decided that a British member of the I.C.S. should be appointed Deputy Leader, who was, however, to be the *de facto* leader. Mr. (later Sir) Geoffrey Corbett, who was Secretary to the Commerce Department at the time and had earlier accompanied Sir Benjamin Robertson to South Africa, was so appointed. It may be added that Corbett was Secretary to Sastri in 1922, when the latter represented India at the Limitation of Armaments Conference in Washington D.C., U.S.A.

The South African Indian Congress, the most representative body of Indians recognised by the Government of India, had wished that the Round Table Conference was quadrilateral instead of bilateral. It wished that, in addition to the representatives of the Governments of India and of South Africa, those of the British Government as well as of the South African Indian Congress were included. But, as Mr. C. F. Andrews pointed out, the inclusion of the British Government's representatives would have assured the failure of the Conference even before it started.<sup>7</sup> And it was also not practical politics to secure the inclusion of the representatives of the South African Indians in the Conference.

The Indian Delegation, as finalised, consisted of Sir Mahommed as leader, Corbett as Deputy Leader, and Sir Pheroze Sethna, a Parsi and a leading Indian businessman from Bombay, Sir Darcy Lindsay, a leading British businessman from Calcutta, Sir George Paddison, a British

<sup>7</sup> *Indian Opinion*, December 3, 1926.

member of the I.C.S. and leader of the earlier Indian Delegation to South Africa, and Sastri. G. S. Bajpai was Secretary.

Mr. S. G. Vaze, a member of the Servants of India Society and the then Editor of the *Servant of India*, was to accompany Sastri unofficially. When Sastri went to Delhi to meet the Viceroy, he was told that Vaze could not accompany him because he was a journalist, and journalists were liable to the irresistible temptation to seek scoops of confidential information. When Sastri gave the assurance that there was no such danger, it was argued that other journalists might complain of partiality to one journalist. When Sastri stopped in Ahmedabad to take leave of Mahatma Gandhi, the latter and Mr. A. V. Thakkar, of the Servants of India Society, insisted that Sastri should be accompanied, and that I should be the person. I received the telegraphic message in Poona at 7.30 a.m. on November 22, 1926, and left for Bombay the same afternoon and sailed with Sastri on the 24th! I had literally to get into the tailored suits made for Vaze, as there was no time to make any for me!

The Viceroy, Mahatma Gandhi and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu advised Sastri to stay over in South Africa after the Conference and create favourable public opinion, provided an agreement was reached, of which the Mahatma was not hopeful.

During the outward voyage the members of the Delegation went over their Instructions. The Government of India had definitely offered to cooperate in the scheme of voluntary repatriation. Sastri was opposed to the offer, as it might be exploited to stimulate repatriation. Mahatma Gandhi had shared the view. But Corbett took a different view. He advocated that the Government of India should accept, cooperate and even stimulate repatriation, as Gokhale, Mahatma Gandhi and the Government of India had agreed to the reduction of the Indian population in South Africa. He would call it "assisted emigration" instead of repatriation, to cover the case of South African-born Indians.

Sastri feared that the Delegation might split on this question. His objection to repatriation was twofold. From the sentimental point of view, it was humiliating that, unlike the whites, Indians, even those born in South Africa,



should formally acknowledge that they were undesirables in South Africa and sign away once and for all their domicile rights for a bonus and passage to India. Secondly, life in India might not suit the Indian emigrants from South Africa, and they were not free to return to South Africa even if they refunded the bonus they received from the South African Government. To meet these objections, Sastri proposed that assisted emigrants should retain their South African domicile for three years, like white emigrants, and be free to return to South Africa on refunding the bonus they received. He realised, however, that not many emigrants would be able to refund the bonus and return to South Africa. But some at least could do so and, in any event, the self-acknowledged stigma of undesirables would be eliminated.

The Indian Delegation landed in Delagoa Bay, Portuguese East Africa, on December 13, 1926, and travelled by a special train to Pretoria, the administrative capital, and reached it on the 14th. The Earl of Athlone, who was then the Governor-General, and Princess Alice invited the Delegation to lunch at Government House. It was a social function. The variety of Indian turbans excited some curiosity. Sir Mahommed wore a turban covered with gold lace; Sastri wore a plain white muslin one; and I had a white one with gold-braid, and we kept our turbans. Not knowing my identity, Princess Alice enquired of Sir Geoffrey whether I was an Indian Prince or Raja! Sir Geoffrey told me later that he had disillusioned the Princess. Whereupon I quipped: "Sir Geoffrey, you are a plebeian, and to you I seem a plebeian. But a Royal Princess, with blue blood in her veins, sees the Prince in me!"

The Delegation reached Cape Town on December 16, 1926, and were accommodated in the Mount Nelson Hotel as guests of the Government. In passing, it may be mentioned that on his previous visit with the Paddison Deputation, Bajpai had made advance reservation in the same Hotel, but when he presented himself at the desk, he was told that no reservation had been made! He was an Indian, though few whites in the wide world equalled his "Western" standard of living!

On December 20, the Mayor of Cape Town gave a luncheon party in honour of the visiting Delegation. For the first time, a few local Indians were invited, but segregated

in a corner. In responding to the toast of the Mayor, Sastri made an impromptu speech, which marked him out at once. He spoke in a humorous vein, disclosing nothing of the purpose of the visit:

"The hospitality and kindness which we have received at your hands today are indeed difficult to acknowledge in suitable terms. Your Mayor told you that he regards us as a mysterious people. I venture to think that in one respect at least our mystery has been completely exposed. You seem by your hospitality to show that you understand fully what the weak part of our nature is.

"When we arrived, we were received by the representatives of your Government, not with garlands and bouquets as we do in India, but with something far more delicious and substantial. They showed us tray upon tray of the most attractive peaches and apricots, and I believe they rejoiced when we drew our chairs in and fell to.

"We are a very grateful people in India; they libel us who say that in none of our languages is there a word for 'thanks.' There is a much better word than 'thanks' 'Thanks,' when we come to think of it, is a retrospective word. In India we look forward when we wish to express our thanks and make a significant enquiry, all the time smiling our sweetest smile, and ask 'When next?'

"For yours is a somewhat later civilization than we have. I will show you how presently. On your invitation cards you have the letters R.S.V.P. We never do it in India, for we cannot imagine how any man can refuse an invitation to a meal. We always accept. If I cannot go myself, I send a very efficient substitute. I send my son, if he a major, or my sons if they are only minors.

"When we were about to leave the hotel to attend this most agreeable function, my leader sent for me, and gave me this instruction: 'Have a care: do not let your tongue run away with you, as it so often does. The Mayor of Cape Town is as well known for his hospitality as for his wit. The lunch will be sumptuous, but in expressing our gratitude, do not give our secrets away!' I will remember this caution, but will admit you to one of our secrets

"We have not yet booked our passages back. So, Mayor of Cape Town, you need entertain no misgivings. Go ahead and fill every part of the programme of entertainments, lunches and

dinners which I know you are arranging. We have a couple of mottoes which we always observe in India: 'Ready, always ready, to come. Never in a hurry to go'.<sup>8</sup>

The speech, the first public one he made in South Africa, made a hit. His reference to his leader's caution was, however, no humorous invention.

The South African Prime Minister, General Hertzog, opened the Conference on December 17, 1926, and struck an optimistic note. It was a fortunate circumstance that he opened the Conference almost immediately after his return from the Imperial Conference of 1926 in London, at which was formulated the famous Balfour Declaration acknowledging the equality and independence of the Dominions on a par with Britain. He was elated with his success. And he was determined that the very first inter-Dominion Conference which independent South Africa held should be crowned with success if only to demonstrate that where British intervention had failed, South Africa succeeded through direct negotiations.

It was also a fortunate circumstance that Bajpai was also in London for the Imperial Conference. He had managed that Hertzog should meet some Indian students in London, which turned out to be an eye-opener to him. On the voyage from London to Cape Town, Bajpai and Hertzog travelled by the same boat and had opportunities for long talks on board, which greatly impressed Hertzog and prepared his mind for the Round Table Conference in Cape Town.

Yet another fortunate circumstance was that, unlike Smuts, Hertzog had no previous unpleasant encounter with Sastri. On the other hand, he was more favourable to Sastri personally if only because he hated Smuts, and Sastri had trounced Smuts. At their very first meeting in Cape Town, Hertzog took very kindly to Sastri and almost monopolised him in conversation. He told Sastri confidentially that the Boers did not hate Indians and that it was the British in Natal that had set up the cry of Indian menace and he felt compelled to do something to satisfy them. If the Indian population in South Africa could be reduced, the rest would be smooth sailing. He would brook no failure of the Conference and requested Sastri to contact him if and

<sup>8</sup> *Sastri Speaks*, p. 1.

when it reached a deadlock. Sastri acted on it more than once, and Hertzog intervened to secure the resumption of the negotiations.

The South African Delegation consisted entirely of members of the Hertzog Government and none from the Opposition which was led by Smuts. The Hon. Dr. D. F. Malan, the Minister of the Interior, was elected Chairman of the Conference. It concluded on January 11, 1927. The Cape Town Agreement was published simultaneously in both countries on February 21, 1927, after the Indian Delegation had returned to Delhi and reported to the Government of India, and both Governments ratified it. Till then dead secrecy was maintained. As was only to be expected, the Conference had its moments of optimism and pessimism and occasional deadlocks. It was given to Sastri to play a vital part, not only in the Indian Delegation but also in the Conference.

## *THE CAPE TOWN AGREEMENT*

INDIA and South Africa approached the question of Indians in South Africa from diametrically opposite points of view. South Africa proposed repatriation to India or segregation in South Africa, while India proposed assimilation in South Africa. The agreed formula for the Round Table Conference was the "maintenance of Western standards of life in South Africa by just and legitimate means." India and South Africa were predisposed to interpret it in opposite ways.

The Cape Town Agreement was necessarily a compromise, but India gained more than South Africa. The latter agreed to drop the Segregation Bill, which was already on the legislative anvil. It was a great relief to India and the Indians in South Africa. On the other hand, South Africa gained in that for the first time the Government of India gave official consent to voluntary repatriation which had been accepted unofficially by Mahatma Gandhi in 1914, and agreed to look after the repatriates on arrival in India. Even here, India gained something. Since the repatriates included not only Indians who were born in India but also those who were born in South Africa, the scheme was named Assisted Emigration. Under the Repatriation Scheme, the emigrant had to surrender his South African domicile once and for ever. Under the Assisted Emigration Scheme he was free to return to South Africa after one year and before three years, on refunding the bonus he had received from South Africa when he left for India. Nobody had any illusion that, since the great bulk of the emigrants would be the poorest section of South African Indians, the chances of many refunding the assistance they had received and returning to South Africa were very slim. But, as stated earlier,

a few could do so, and that was an improvement. From the point of view of self-respect or *izzat*, the Assisted Emigration Scheme was a decided improvement on the old Repatriation Scheme.

India's gain was more pronounced in the "Uplift" part of the Agreement, which ran as follows:

"The Union Government recognise that Indians domiciled in the Union, who are prepared to conform to Western standards of life, should be enabled to do so. The Union Government firmly believe in and adhere to the principle that it is the duty of every civilised Government to devise ways and means and take all possible steps for the uplifting of every section of their permanent population to the full extent of their capacity and opportunities, and accept the view that in the provision of educational and other facilities the considerable number of Indians who remain part of the permanent population should not be allowed to lag behind other sections of the people."

For a Government, which swore to get rid of Indians altogether, the "Uplift" Clause was a remarkable change of front, favourable to India. Here again Sastri's part was large and decisive.

Another and quite unexpected windfall for India was the request of the South African Government that India should send an Agent to South Africa to "secure continuous and effective cooperation between the two Governments." It is significant that there was no reciprocal request from India for a South African Agent in India.

The Rev. C. F. Andrews, whose interest in Indians overseas was unexcelled, had been invited to join the Indian Delegation. He had declined out of loyalty to Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement in India. He was, however, present in Cape Town before, during and after the Conference and kept in touch with the Indian Delegation and with the representatives of the South African Indian Congress who had assembled in Cape Town. He lived in a private home and dropped in frequently at the Mount Nelson Hotel to meet the members of the Indian Delegation. He insisted that the Indian Delegation should not meet without him, should take him into full confidence and should act on his advice. For, he claimed to represent Mahatma Gandhi and the people of India while the Dele-

gation represented only the Government of India! He gave an ultimatum that, if he was kept out of the secrets of the Conference, he would cable Mahatma Gandhi and the Viceroy and be done with it!

The Indian Delegation knew that Andrews was incapable of keeping secrets, particularly from the South African Indian Congress representatives. At the same time, they realised that he had to be kept in good humour, lest a cable from him to India should queer the pitch for them. The delicate and unwelcome task of humouring Andrews fell largely to Sastri. Innocent as an angel, poor Andrews did not see through the diplomacy. He would promise to respect secrecy, but would almost immediately disclose to his local Indian friends whatever he was told! He was, therefore, humoured but not taken into confidence. The Indian Delegation dreaded his visits to them. On one occasion, when the Conference faced a deadlock and break-up, the Indian Delegation met for a secret session late at night. When the members took their seats Sir Pheroze Sethna whispered: "Charlie is coming." By a sudden, common and automatic impulse, every member shoved his papers into his drawer and sat back with ill-concealed apprehension on his face and with a laboured talk on the weather on his lips! Sir Geoffrey was on the verge of tears. Then Sir Pheroze laughed outright at the practical joke that he had played on his colleagues.<sup>1</sup>

Sastri made one of his best speeches when he defended his proposal that the Indian-assisted emigrant should not be obliged to acknowledge that he was an "undesirable" in South Africa, but should have the right to return, if he so desired. With righteous indignation, he asked one of the members of the South African Delegation to put himself in the shoes of the Indian and say how he would feel if he was told that he was an undesirable in South Africa and was pressed to betake himself to some other country on a bonus of £5. The speech created a profound impression. When ultimately his suggestion was accepted by the Conference, Sastri felt that a breach had been made in the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement of 1914 in favour of the Indian.

In the final stages of the Conference, Sir Mahommed was persuaded, over the head of his colleagues, to agree with Malan that the full text of the Agreement reached at

<sup>1</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, December 21, 1926.

the Conference should not be published but only a very general statement. It was feared that the South African Government would not wish to publish the concessions made to India, and in consequence, India should not publish the concessions she made to South Africa. Sastri and Sethna strongly protested against the matter and the manner of Sir Mahommed's decision. In consequence, it was finally agreed to add an annexure to the Agreement. The Annexure was more significant, particularly from the Indian point of view, since it contained the Uplift Clause.

Sir Geoffrey Corbett, who was officially the Deputy Leader of the Indian Delegation but had assumed the responsibilities of the *de facto* Leader, had at the outset passed on instructions to Sastri not to let me see any of the Conference documents. Sastri passed on both the instructions and the documents to me, and I was discreet and dumb!

There was general keenness and even anxiety to know what had happened at the Conference and if any agreement was reached at all. The press and those who thought they knew began to speculate. Secrecy sat heavily on the members of the Conference, and Sir Geoffrey kept a close watch on his wards. On the eve of their departure from Cape Town for India, the Indian Delegation was treated to a farewell reception by the local Indians in the Town Hall. In his speech, Sir Mahommed scrupulously avoided any reference to the results of the Conference. Disappointment in the audience was palpable. As the Delegates and audience rose to leave, there rose an incessant plea for Sastri to speak. Bidden by Sir Mahommed to respond, Sastri, who had already taken a few steps towards the door, stopped where he was and spoke a few words on the spur of the moment and to the following effect: "We leave Cape Town pleased with our labours, and if Indians in South Africa will play the game, the future is full of hope." The speech was received with wild cheering for the message of hope it contained. In a few hours, thanks to Reuters, the tense anxiety in India, South Africa and England was relieved, and messages of congratulations began to pour in from all quarters. The Indians in South Africa experienced the joy of a prisoner reprieved from the gallows.

Sir Geoffrey felt that Sastri was guilty of indiscipline as well as indiscretion which might embarrass the South



African Government and imperil the Cape Town Agreement. He conveyed his displeasure to Sastri and complained to Sir Mahommed and asked him to exercise greater control over Sastri's propensity to make indiscreet disclosures. With gentle humour, Sir Mahommed informed Sir Geoffrey that Sastri had long and varied experience of public life at the highest levels and that it was unnecessary, even impertinent, to seek to discipline him. Nevertheless, Sir Geoffrey was angry and uneasy and sent messages to Sastri to be careful in his subsequent speeches in South Africa. His fears that Sastri's disclosure in Cape Town would jeopardise the Agreement and embarrass the Union Ministers proved unfounded. Both Hertzog and Malan assured Sastri that his remarks were appropriate and called for. This view was shared generally in South Africa, India and Britain. In his subsequent speech in Durban, the chief centre of Indians in the Union, Sastri committed a "calculated indiscretion" when he said on January 11, 1927:

"Our representations in respect of the mission on which we have come have been received with such friendliness and such sympathy that our expectations have been in that respect not only entirely met but greatly exceeded. . . . A new era is dawning on the relations between South Africa and India. Although, as I have said before, you may easily expect too much, it is bare truth to say that our negotiations will bear some fruit of which we need not be ashamed and for which you may be grateful."<sup>2</sup>

Sastri did not regret his "indiscretion" then or subsequently. Speaking as the Indian Agent in Cape Town on October 22, 1927, he said:

"The last time that I appeared in this place was on the eve of my departure from this country. I ventured at an entertainment to say that the Conference had been a success, that the Indian Delegation, who came with anxious hearts, were returning fully satisfied, and that if only the Indians resident in South Africa 'played the game,' they could hope soon to see better days dawning on them. When I spoke, it was still understood that the Agreement was to be a secret. But I knew there were many who were eager to have a glimpse of the result, many of

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Opinion*, January 21, 1927, p. 22.

my countrymen who felt that their fate hung on the results of the Conference, and would be glad to be assured that the Conference did not leave matters worse than they were before. I thought I said the right thing. I thought it was due to my colleagues in the Union Ministry to say that we had received from them, not only hospitality and courtesy and the reception due to allies in a difficult position, but I felt that I was paying a compliment that had been ten times deserved, and at the same time I could not help leaving a word of hope with my countrymen here, whose affairs we, the delegation, had come to compose.

"At that time it was held in certain quarters that I had been guilty of an indiscretion. After so many months in which to think over, I do not think I have come to regret what I said on that occasion. When a great act is done, when a noble step has been taken towards peace, the word of commendation and praise, the word of thanksgiving cannot be delayed a moment."<sup>3</sup>

On the return voyage to India, the Indian Delegation felt somewhat anxious as to the reception that the Cape Town Agreement would have in India. It was between the two Governments concerned. It was the era of Non-cooperation in India, and the prevailing tendency was to denounce anything done by the Government of India. The Agreement was a compromise. The critics of the Government of India would be tempted to seize on the concessions made by India, and denounce the Agreement and the Government of India for agreeing to it. Sastri was of the view that the fate of the Agreement would depend largely on the opinion of Mahatma Gandhi who, besides being the leader of the Congress movement, was also the greatest living Indian authority on the question of Indians in South Africa. He, therefore, suggested that the Agreement should be shown to the Mahatma privately and before its publication and his blessing secured, if possible.

It was as unconventional and bold as it was embarrassing to the bureaucratic tradition of the Government of India. It was for the Government to make agreements and then announce them. It was highly improper for it to seek the prior approval of a non-official, however eminent he might be. In the particular instance, the Mahatma had declared himself the enemy of the Government of India as then constituted and was conducting a campaign of Non-coopera-

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Opinion*, November 4, 1927, p. 294.

tion. It would be an intolerable humiliation for it to solicit his prior approval. Sastri, however, pressed his view that it was the best course to save the Agreement.

Sir Mahommed fell in with his view, and put it to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, soon after the Delegation reached Delhi to report to the Government of India. Lord Irwin approved of it and commissioned Sastri himself to undertake the mission to the Mahatma. The Mahatma was then engaged in a whirlwind campaign of Non-cooperation and was making several speeches in several places each day. It was only after Sastri reached Bhusawal that an engagement could be fixed, and it was in a moving train! It was a slow passenger, which stopped at every station *en route*. At every station there were huge crowds of people to have *darshan* of the Mahatma. For the sake of privacy of talk, the Mahatma and Sastri travelled in a first class *coupé*. Sastri's narrative was interrupted by the halts of the train at every station, when the Mahatma had to be persuaded to stand by the open door to give *darshan*. Sastri picked up the threads of his story after each such interruption. Before he could conclude, the Mahatma reached his destination, where he was to take his evening meal and make another public speech. Sastri continued his story till Mahatma left for the public meeting. But before leaving, the Mahatma said that Sastri's account satisfied him that the Delegation did much better than he could have expected, that he would welcome the Agreement and would write out his opinion almost immediately and send it to the Associated Press of India for release when the Agreement was published by the Government. He asked that a copy of the Agreement should be left with him. Sastri returned to Delhi and reported success. Gratifying as it was, Government wanted to be doubly sure and nominated Sastri to the Indian Legislative Assembly to defend the Agreement when it was debated. But his intervention was not needed and he resigned from the Assembly.

Before publishing it, the Viceroy showed the Agreement to some of the leading members of the Indian Legislative Assembly, and Sastri sent confidential memoranda to the editors of some leading newspapers like *The Hindu* and the *New India* in Madras, the *Leader* in Allahabad, and the *Daily Mail* in Bombay.

On February 21, 1927, the Agreement was published.

The Associated Press of India released simultaneously the opinion thereon of the Mahatma. In the course of it, he said:

"Sir Mahommed Habibullah and his colleagues are to be congratulated upon having secured a settlement that is honourable to both parties. It is not the best that could be conceived, but it is the best that was possible. I doubt if any other deputation could have done more. . . . The Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri, who, when the Deputation sailed for South Africa, was of all members the most communicative and had warned us not to expect much, did not conceal at the end of the labours of the Conference his satisfaction at the result. A perusal of the settlement warrants the satisfaction."

He went on to say:

"But like all compromises, this one is not without its danger points. . . . But the compromise is acceptable in spite of the dangers referred to by me, not so much for what has been achieved as for the almost sudden transformation of the atmosphere in South Africa from one of remorseless hostility towards Indians to that of a generous toleration and from complete social ostracism to that of admission of Indians to social functions."

He ended by suggesting that Sastri should be the first Indian Agent in South Africa:

"The success of the settlement very largely depends upon the selection of the Consul or the Commissioner who will be selected to represent the Government of India . . . He must be an Indian. The very fact that he is an Indian will strike the imagination of the European population and raise the Indian settlers in European estimation. . . . If a man can be selected who will command the equal esteem of the Union Government, we need not fear the future. Such a man, in my humble opinion, is Mr. Srinivasa Sastri."<sup>4</sup>

Though a compromise, India gained more than South Africa. Competent critics in India thought that India gained everything and lost nothing, that the Agreement

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Opinion*, March 26, 1927, p. 85.

was too good to be true, and they wondered if it contained some hidden catches, some undisclosed concessions, some secret clauses. Even Mahatma Gandhi wondered if the South African Government would be faithful to the Agreement and carry their Parliament and electorate with them. Sastri was confident. Replying to the misgivings of Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar, Sastri underlined the following words: "*The Boer Ministry have changed their heart.*"<sup>5</sup>

Public opinion in South Africa acknowledged, some with regret, that India had scored a victory. The *Natal Witness*, a balanced British-owned paper, commented that to those who were familiar with the methods of the bad old diplomacy, the new Indian Agreement must appear, first and foremost, as an easy win on points for the Indian Delegation, which secured all it set out for and several basketfuls of quite useful fragments to boot, without themselves contributing anything tangible to the common stock, but that departure from even balance was not in any case to be deplored.<sup>6</sup> The *Natal Mercury*, British-owned but bitterly anti-Indian, observed that Malan and the South African Delegation had been out-witted by the Indian Delegation. Some South African critics of the Agreement spread the rumour that the Indian Delegation had bribed the South African Delegation with Indian gold and got them to sign the Agreement! At a reception to the Habibullah Delegation in India, Sastri referred to this rumour and complained that Sir Mahommed had given none of the gold to the Indian Delegation! Some papers took his remark seriously and rebuked him for revealing such secrets of diplomacy! They had to be told subsequently that Sastri was merely joking! The *Natal Advertiser*, a British and liberal paper, saw the deeper significance of the Agreement. It said that the Agreement, particularly the "Uplift" section in it, was a charter of hope, not only for the Asiatic, but as a statement of political ethics, redounding greatly to the credit of its joint authors, would find an echo in the heart of every non-European in South Africa, and the black man would read into it a promise that even he would one day be emancipated from the statute-tyranny of a colour bar.<sup>7</sup> Some members of the South African Parliament, particularly those

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 276.

<sup>6</sup> *Indian Opinion*, February 25, 1927, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, March 4, 1927, p. 64.

from Natal, were opposed to the "Uplift" section of the Agreement. They feared that if Indians were given better education and sanitation and general uplift not inferior to any other community, including the whites, they were bound to demand political rights in course of time and that would be the end of white supremacy in South Africa. The *Die Africaner*, a Boer paper, agreed that educational and other facilities should be given to all sections of the permanent population of South Africa and admitted that such education and the acquisition of Western standards of civilisation would lead to the demand for the franchise. To deny it was unjust; to grant it was dangerous to the whites. So it advocated segregation of the races and opposed the dropping of the Bill to segregate Indians!

South African support to the Agreement was largely due to the hope that, with the active cooperation of the Government of India, the Assisted Emigration Scheme would reduce the Indian population in South Africa to such a minimum that the "Uplift" clause would be of little consequence.

Opinion among the Indians in South Africa was divided. The more influential South African Indian Congress was persuaded to count the gains rather than the losses and give the Agreement a fair trial. At its conference held in Johannesburg on March 2, 1927, it welcomed the Agreement, particularly the "Uplift" part of it, while criticising certain omissions and vague promises. It heartily supported Mahatma Gandhi's suggestion that Sastri should be the first Agent of the Government of India and appealed to him to accept it.

On his return to India, Sastri wrote and spoke in defence of the Agreement, and emphasised the constitutional advance which the Round Table Conference registered for India. It was the first time that India negotiated direct with another Dominion without the intervention of the British Government and secured an agreement. It was led by an Indian, with Indian and British colleagues. Sastri pleaded that these advances should be appreciated, maintained and improved upon.

*FIRST INDIAN AGENT IN SOUTH AFRICA*

ONE of the most significant features of the Cape Town Agreement was the request of the South African Government that the Government of India should appoint an Agent in South Africa to secure continuous and effective cooperation between the two Governments. For years past public opinion in India had been pleading for the appointment of Agents of the Government of India in all countries where Indians, particularly indentured immigrants, were settled in some numbers, to watch over their interests. But the Colonial Governments had not favoured the idea. The Cape Town Agreement provided for it. It is significant that, far from the Government of India seeking the consent of the South African Government, it was the latter that requested the former for an Agent! It was another feather in the cap of the Indian Delegation.

Who was to be the first Indian Agent? Mahatma Gandhi suggested Sastri. Almost instinctively all others named him. It was proof, if it was needed, that he played the most important part in the Conference. Public opinion in India and in South Africa, Indian and European, unanimously nominated him.

The Viceroy sounded Sastri. Sastri declined. In his letter of March 19, 1927, to the Viceroy, Sastri explained that he declined the offer not because of any objection to serve under the Crown or because of his Presidentship of the Servants of India Society,<sup>1</sup> but because he felt that he was not competent to undertake the administrative work of an Agent. He also anticipated that a Royal Commission was likely to be appointed soon to review the political progress

<sup>1</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, March 19, 1927.

of India, and he wished to be in India at the time. Further, his health was unsatisfactory; he had been suffering from angina pectoris since 1923, and was at the moment resting under medical advice. He felt that he would have to go alone and leave behind his wife, to whom he was devoted and whose nursing he depended upon. He did not want to die in exile in South Africa.

But public opinion became increasingly insistent that he should be appointed Agent. Sir Mahommed personally pleaded with him. Mr. S. Satyamurthy, who was an unsparing critic of Sastri in Indian politics, joined the chorus. In a moment of exasperation, Sastri permitted himself the somewhat uncharitable remark that Satyamurthy wished him out of India and die in South Africa! His resistance broke down when the Mahatma wrote to him on April 6, 1927:

"This is from a sick bed. I had hoped to see you in Bangalore and press my suit. But it cannot be for some time yet. I have no reply to my wire which I hope you did get. You will break the heart of Indians in South Africa if you do not go. . . . You can make it clear to Lord Irwin that you want to be here when the Royal Commission comes. Lastly, there will be no fear of pinpricks whilst Lord Irwin is Viceroy. He knows you well. I urge you to reconsider your decision and go even for one year. You alone can inaugurate the working of the compact; you alone can set the tone."<sup>2</sup>

In forwarding a copy of the letter to a friend, Sastri commented: "A letter to settle one's fate."

The Viceroy assured Sastri that the Royal Commission on India would not be appointed that year.

While the negotiations were going on, the *Cape Times* demanded an explanation for the delay in announcing Sastri's appointment. It was due to the India Office's objection to Sastri and preference for Sir George Paddison. Finally, the Viceroy made the firm offer. On May 5, 1927, Sastri wired acceptance for one year and suggested immediate announcement to stop speculation. The announcement was made the next day.

There was some adverse criticism in the *Servants of India Society* that its previous consent was not taken.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 77.



Sastri's explanation was accepted. He, however, resigned his Presidentship and retained his membership of the Society. I was permitted to accompany him unofficially.<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Sastri naturally presumed that she would accompany her husband and started making preparations. But Sastri felt she would not be able to adjust herself to the life he had to live in South Africa and be happy; she would be more a handicap than help to him. But he had not the heart to tell her and disappoint her. He postponed the evil day, as it were. Finally, Mr. V. Venkatasubbaiya, who was the head of the Madras Branch of the Servants of India Society and was on intimate terms with the Sastris, was persuaded to introduce the subject and get the matter settled, to avoid last-minute disappointment. He came to Bangalore, called the couple together and put leading questions to Sastri. Mrs. Sastri was surprised and Sastri embarrassed. When she was told of the life she would have to live in South Africa as the wife of the Indian Agent, Mrs. Sastri herself decided that she should not go. With a heavy heart, the brave yet sad lady turned to me, and her moist eyes pleaded eloquently with me to look after her beloved husband in his exile. It was a touching scene. Hers was a great sacrifice.

Sastri called on Mahatma Gandhi who was resting at Nandi, near Bangalore, and then proceeded to Simla to receive his seal of office, as it were, and bid farewell to Sir Mahommed. There he met for the first time Mr. J. D. Tyson, who was then Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal and who was to be his official Secretary in South Africa.

In commending Sastri to the South African Indians, Mahatma Gandhi assured them that it was impossible to find a worthier, abler and more impartial representative of India than Sastri and advised them not to expect too much from him, nor to seek relief in purely individual cases through him, and not to swerve from the truth in their dealing with him, and warned them that all their grievances would not disappear with his coming to South Africa. Sastri would have done enough for them if he succeeded in seeing that no new restrictive legislation was passed against them, that the old restrictive laws were not operated harshly and that the spirit of the Cape Town Agreement was honoured by the South African Government. These constituted

<sup>3</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, May 5, 1927.

Sastri's Instrument of Instructions, as it were, from the Mahatma which were as important as those of the Government of India. The Mahatma's message was timely and most needed at the time.

Sastri left Bombay on June 8, 1927, and reached Delagoa Bay on June 27, and was received there by the newly appointed Commissioner for Asiatic Affairs. On the train Sastri was given a saloon used by Cabinet Ministers. It was partly in honour of his rank as a Privy Councillor and partly to avoid any possible incidents from anti-Indian whites.

When Sastri arrived in South Africa as Agent of the Government of India, the situation was anything but encouraging. Though the Cape Town Agreement had been ratified by the South African Parliament, it was not supported by Smuts, the Leader of the Opposition. Legislation to implement the part of the Agreement which referred to Assisted Emigration and restrictions on immigration was promptly enacted. But no action had been taken regarding the "Uplift" part of the Agreement, like education, housing, etc. Since about eighty per cent of the Indian population in South Africa was concentrated in the province of Natal and by law confined to it and as education and health and trade licences were provincial subjects, the main responsibility for the uplift of Indians fell on the Provincial Government of Natal and the Corporation of Durban. Their sympathy was essential. Unfortunately, it was not forthcoming at the time. Natal had grievances against the South African Government. It was almost wholly British, while the South African Government was almost wholly Boer. Natal owed allegiance to the South African Party of Smuts, while the South African Government owed allegiance to the Nationalist Party of Hertzog. Natal felt that, without its prior consent, the Hertzog Government promised uplift of Indians, the main burden of which would fall on it. There was also the feeling, fairly widespread, that the Cape Town Agreement was a victory for India and a defeat for South Africa. For all these reasons, the Natal Provincial Council formally repudiated the Agreement by a majority of seventeen to three! The Durban Corporation was sullen. The South African Government shrank from urging the Natal Provincial Government to honour the "Uplift" part of the Agreement and maintained discreet silence.

The South African Indians welcomed the "Uplift" part of the Agreement. They disfavoured the part which sought to reduce the Indian population in South Africa by means of Assisted Emigration, and they were alarmed that the South African Government was quick to legislate for it. The new legislation empowered the Government to arrest and deport Indians who had entered the country illegally and with fraudulent documents, irrespective of the period of their residence in the country. Indians feared that Government would embark on a vigorous drive to ferret out illegal entrants and deport them. They viewed the prospect with disappointment and apprehension.

The appointment of Sastri as Agent of the Government of India in South Africa was viewed by Indians with hopeful expectations and with some suspicion by the anti-Indian whites. The Agents of the Government of India elsewhere were civil servants. Not all of them were even members of the Indian Civil Service either. Why was a departure made in the case of South Africa by the selection of an Indian non-official of the eminence of Sastri? Had he some ulterior objective up his sleeve?

The fact that Sastri and I were Indians by race was a handicap at the outset. It was only after persuasive pressure on the part of the Commissioner for Asiatic Affairs and only after an urgent meeting of its Board of Directors that the Grand Hotel, Pretoria, opened its doors just wide enough to accommodate us. Such luck was not forthcoming in Johannesburg, Durban and Pietermaritzburg. In Johannesburg, the local Theosophical Society came to our rescue by offering its modest rooms.

Malan received Sastri very cordially in Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa, and informed him of Natal's repudiation of the Agreement, regretted that he was helpless, and left it to Sastri to win over Natal to the "Uplift" part of the Agreement and offered to issue formal directives to Natal if and when Sastri reported success. Sastri protested. It was not his duty to plead with South African citizens to support the policies of their Government. But Malan said that, if Sastri was keen on the uplift of Indians, he had better undertake the unusual task or nothing would be done.

On June 28, 1927, the day of his arrival in Pretoria, Sastri gave his first great policy speech at a reception at

which there were both Indians and whites.

"It is a compromise, as you all know, and compromise is the very soul of political progress. Now, in a compromise no party carries away the entire honour of the negotiations. Each party gives in a little and takes a little from the other side. . . . When we enter a compromise and address ourselves to the task of fulfilling it, those to whom falls the burden, believe me, cannot afford to neglect the part which they consider unfavourable and concentrate upon the part which they consider favourable. That is a departure from all honourable and chivalrous dealing."<sup>4</sup>

At the banquet organised by Indians in Johannesburg on July 6, 1927, nearly half the guests were whites. Mr. Leslie Blackwell, M.P., a member of the South African Party of Smuts, was among the speakers. He had opposed the Agreement in Parliament; he was among those who wondered why so eminent an Indian as Sastri was sent to a comparatively small post of Agent and suspected that Sastri had come to ask for the franchise for Indians. After hearing Sastri, Blackwell said that he "stood on the stool of repentance" and welcomed the Agreement.

In Durban, the main centre of the Indian population in Natal, no European hotel would accept Sastri and me. Luckily, an Indian, Mr. E. M. Paruk, had a decent house which he placed at our disposal. Tyson had no difficulty in finding accommodation in the leading European Club. And it was a great advantage, as it gave him welcome opportunities for meeting the leading whites informally and collecting their reactions and passing them on to Sastri.

The Natal Indian Congress organised a grand reception to welcome Sastri. They asked Sir Charles Smith, the leader of the South African Party in Natal, to join in the welcome. He said that he would make up his mind only after meeting Sastri, called on him and joined in the welcome. In a private letter, dated July 15, 1927, Sastri thus described the situation:

"Durban is the hardest nut to crack. But I must try my teeth on it tomorrow. The Governor-General is here and will see me tomorrow. An unusually large attendance of Europeans is expected at tomorrow's function. The Congress office is flooded

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Opinion*, July 1, 1927, p. 177.

with applications for tickets in person—a circumstance so unprecedented that the Secretary is proud. One of the most wealthy and influential merchants, Sir Charles Smith, came to see me here today. He was requested to speak, but would not give an answer until he had seen me. Several South African Party leaders warned him against acceptance. But after hearing me he said that nothing would stop him but he must attend and speak. I hear he is a great catch. I am awfully nervous and excited. I trust I shan't make a mess.

"Dr. Malan was markedly kind and courteous. So was his wife. I have had a very important talk with him. The bother is, he is powerless in Natal and asked me to prepare the ground; I have to see rabid anti-Indians and mollify, if possible.

"I am living in the house of a Mohammedan merchant in one of the best localities, but I find my own food, having engaged three servants. To this house I must ask Europeans. Will they come? So I am casting my net warily—Indians I am disposing of—a few for each meal."<sup>5</sup>

At the reception, Sastri made his second great policy speech in which he said that he would not travel beyond the four corners of the Agreement and it contained no reference to the franchise.

"Whatever my character may be as a political agitator of some standing in my own country [laughter], believe me that, while I am among you, clothed with the authority of the Government of India, I will endeavour faithfully to confine my vision to the four corners of the Agreement. . . . Moreover, in so far as I have any influence with my own countrymen, I shall use it for securing the same observance by them of the limitations of the Agreement. But I cannot speak for young and ambitious hearts. . . . I have heard it said that they have often asked for the franchise, which has caused alarm in the minds of those now in political power. Ladies and gentlemen, I have read the Agreement carefully—I took some part in the preparation of it—and all I need say is that I do not find the franchise in that Agreement. That should reassure you of the length to which I am prepared to go."<sup>6</sup>

About the franchise, he said:

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 281.

<sup>6</sup> *Indian Opinion*, July 22, 1927, p. 202.

"But to you who represent the ruling class in this country, may I say one word in this connection which may not be inappropriate? Our country, India, is marching forward towards that Dominion Status, the final consummation of which had lately been reached by your country. [Applause] Do you then think it unnatural that my countrymen should feel inspired by that achievement? They had the parliamentary franchise here until the law took it away a generation ago. It was only two years ago that the municipal franchise was taken away. Do you think it possible for them to forget it so soon? I cannot control their ambitions, and all you can ask is that we confine our resolutions rigidly to the four corners of the Agreement. I would ask you, therefore, if now and again you hear words about the franchise, to exercise a little patience and forbearance and remember that our hearts are the same as your hearts and if we occasionally dare, it is only human for us to do so."

With solemn and impressive eloquence, he appealed to the Natal whites, who were more British than the British, as it were, not to forget and betray the honour of the Union Jack and its traditions of chivalry, fair play and freedom, while remembering only its might and majesty and its political advantages for themselves.

The speech was electrical in its effect. Sastri's good faith was at once acknowledged, and he won the confidence of the whites to a remarkable degree. Sir Charles Smith, who had made a very cordial speech at the reception, printed and circulated the full text of Sastri's speech.

It was great good luck that His Excellency the Earl of Athlone, then Governor-General of South Africa, was in Durban. He knew Sastri and invited him to a garden party on July 20, 1927. He introduced Sastri to Sir George Plowman, Administrator of Natal, who engaged Sastri long in conversation and ultimately introduced him to the Mayor of Durban and other leading invitees. While talking to the Mayor, Sastri playfully wondered if he, the Mayor, would receive Sastri socially. The Mayor rose to the challenge, and volunteered then and there that he would invite the leading white citizens to lunch or dinner and was sure that none would refuse. Sir Charles Smith also gave a dinner party. Thus, a breach was made in the social wall.

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Opinion*, July 22, 1927, p. 204.

Sastri's most important task was to establish personal contacts with Europeans and Indians and win both alike to a faithful observance of the Agreement. Social entertainment was perhaps the most potent instrument for it. It was out of the question at the time for him to invite both Indians and whites together; the latter would decline. So, he had to invite them separately, as preparatory to inviting them together.

Andrews was in South Africa with a view to preparing the ground for Sastri. He had ready access to both Indians and Europeans, and more so, to the clergy. Of course, he had great influence with Mahatma Gandhi. He was of the view that Sastri should live in style, befitting the representative of the Government of India and on a level with a Cabinet Minister, if only to impress the whites, who had known Indians mostly as lowly labourers or petty traders. Mahatma Gandhi had, however, advocated that Sastri should live in a very austere style to symbolise the poverty of India. Sastri preferred the middle way.

Andrews advocated liberal hospitality for its contact value and insisted that Sastri, though a vegetarian, should offer meat to his guests but not alcoholic drinks. He argued that European guests, whom it was necessary to court, would shy away if they were offered only vegetarian food. But he banned drinks, because Mahatma Gandhi advocated Prohibition! The plea that European guests were used not only to meat but also to drinks and that Sastri was an official of the Government of India which had not adopted Prohibition in India, much less imposed it on its representatives abroad, and that European guests might shy away if they were not served drinks, made no appeal to him. Sastri could neither accept nor reject the advice of Andrews. An unfavourable report from him might prejudice Mahatma Gandhi and render Sastri's work more difficult. So, he adopted a compromise. He invited only Indian guests as long as Andrews was in the country and served no drinks. After his departure, he invited white guests as well and served them drinks, as was the local custom. This portfolio was assigned to Tyson, as Sastri and I lacked the necessary qualification! In course of time Sastri was able to invite Europeans and Indians together. He and I were admitted to European hotels, and he was even welcomed as an honoured guest. Well before he left South Africa, even the

most exclusive European homes felt honoured to have him as a house guest. His social conquest was complete.

One of the terms of the Cape Town Agreement was the appointment of a commission to report on the state of Indian education in Natal which was "admittedly grave." Sastri assigned higher priority to it than to housing, another of the items of "Uplift" in the Agreement. But local white opinion preferred the other way, for it feared educating the Indian, lest he should one day ask for the franchise. Housing reform could be better used to secure the segregation of Indians. At the Governor-General's lunch party on July 22, 1927, the Governor-General, the Administrator of Natal and Sastri discussed Natal's attitude towards the Agreement in general and Indian education in particular. The Administrator undertook definitely to persuade his Executive Council to appoint the Education Commission. He also said that because of Sastri, things would move; else nothing would be done.<sup>a</sup> It marked the turning point: Natal would honour the "Uplift" clause of the Agreement. Sastri promptly informed Malan of the welcome change, and Malan formally requested the Natal Provincial Government to implement the Agreement. On September 22, 1927, which happened to be his birthday, Sastri was given the privilege of publicly announcing that the Education Commission would be appointed in pursuance of the Agreement. No birthday present was more welcome to him. His hope that Natal would "travel from repudiation to toleration and so through to complete consent" was realised. In little over two months of his arrival in Natal, Sastri had the gratification of seeing the first tangible fruit of his mission. The *Natal Advertiser* of September 23, 1927, said: "We are extremely pleased that Mr. Sastri's great work in this Province has resulted already in the appointment of the Education Commission which the Cape Town Agreement foreshadowed." The *Natal Witness* of September 27, 1927, said: "There has, indeed, been an astonishing revolution in public opinion, and the problem is now approached with goodwill and in the right way." Even the anti-Indian *Natal Mercury*, which had earlier thought that Sastri was putting the cart before the horse in giving priority to education over sanitation, accepted the *fait accompli* as gracefully as it could but insinuated that the Commission would ask the Central Gov-

<sup>a</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 282.



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<sup>8</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 282.

ernment or the Indian community and not the Natal Administration to pay for Indian education.<sup>9</sup> It complained that Sastri was allowed to announce the appointment of the Commission before the Natal Administration.

There was, however, many a slip between the cup and the lip. When, on November 17, 1927, the Indian Education Commission was formally announced, it was found that its personnel consisted of the members of the Natal Executive Council and two members of the Natal Provincial Council and no educational experts! The Executive was to sit in judgment on its own previous policies, which were frankly and repressively anti-Indian! The composition of the Commission was not calculated to inspire confidence. The *Cape Times* (December 6, 1927) severely criticised it. "The Natal Administration has decided to ignore all suggestions for giving the Commission either an independent or an expert character. . . . The Commission is not really a Commission at all; it is practically a Select Committee of the Provincial Council, and the only two members who are not also members of the Provincial Executive are . . . known to be anti-Indian in their views."<sup>10</sup>

The Agreement provided for obtaining the assistance of an educational expert from the Government of India. Sastri asked for two. The Government of India deputed Mr. K. P. Kitchlu, then Vice-Chancellor of the Agra University, and Miss G. Gordon, of the Madras Teachers' Training College. These were not co-opted as members of the Education Commission, but were allowed to examine witnesses through the Chairman of the Commission. The experts from India made a thorough study of Indian education in Natal and submitted a very valuable and revealing memorandum.

The Indian leaders, who were dissatisfied with the composition and procedure of the Commission, contemplated boycotting it. But Sastri, who privately shared their disappointment, persuaded them to lead evidence before the Commission, which they did with great effect. He himself gave evidence, particularly with regard to the significance of the "Uplift" part of the Agreement which said that Indians should not be allowed to lag behind "other sections of the people." The Commission were keen on getting him to say that Indian education should not lag behind Euro-

<sup>9</sup> *Servant of India*, December 1, 1927, p. 528.

<sup>10</sup> *Indian Opinion*, December 16, 1927, p. 337.

pean education here and now, so that they could sabotage the Agreement as undermining white supremacy in South Africa, or shift the full financial responsibility of improving Indian education on to the South African Government, which it was unlikely to accept, and, in consequence, the *status quo ante* might be continued. Sastri declined to walk into the trap and interpreted the Agreement to say: "We should make no distinction between different elements of the community. The goal may be reached in several steps, and it may be very long in being consummated, but that is what is clearly visualised as the goal."

One of the findings of the Indian educational experts was that the Natal Provincial revenues made a contribution towards European education, in addition to the subsidy from the South African Government. The latter Government gave Natal a subsidy for Indian education also, but the proportion was much less. The Natal Government made no contribution to Indian education from its provincial revenues, to which Indians also contributed. On the other hand, it diverted towards European education, part of the Central subsidy for Indian education! The excuse of the Natal Administration that the Central subsidy was not earmarked for Indian education, was disowned by the Central Government. The Commission was obliged to recommend that, thereafter, the whole of the Central subsidy for Indian education should be earmarked for it.

Sastri discovered that the Indian community in Natal had, in spite of its comparative poverty, made commendable and even heroic efforts to start and run schools for its children to supplement the meagre and grudging provision made by the Government. He felt that if it could, by further sacrifice and self-help, establish an institution for higher education it would be a great help to Indians themselves and also strike the imagination of the whites and dispel the prevailing but unfounded notion that Indians did not care for education. He, therefore, appealed to it to subscribe about £20,000 to build a secondary school and hostel. He himself went about helping to collect the necessary funds, and persuaded the Durban Corporation, against much opposition and delay, to grant a site in the city area. The foundation-stone of the school, called Sastri College, was laid by the Administrator of Natal, and subsequently it was opened by the Governor-General, the Earl of Athlone. The project

created a good impression. The *Natal Advertiser* observed that Indians had done more for their education in nine months than the whites had done for theirs in as many years.

The Cape Town Agreement provided for an enquiry into the housing conditions of Indians in and about Durban and the appointment of Indians to advisory committees and the provision of land without racial restrictions for their housing. Under pressure from Sastri, an enquiry was held, but without enthusiasm and grace. It was at first proposed that a special commission should be appointed and that it should include representatives of the Natal Administration and the Durban Municipal Corporation and two Indians nominated by Sastri. But, subsequently, the first two declined, and the idea of the commission fell through and with it the chance of having two Indians as members. It was a great disappointment to the Indians as well as to Sastri. Ultimately, the Central Housing Board was asked to make the enquiry. The terms of reference fell short of the promise in the Agreement. It was a greater disappointment to Indians, who decided to boycott the enquiry. Though equally disappointed, Sastri persuaded them to accept the enquiry with its limitations and give evidence. The enquiry upheld almost all the contentions of the Indians and put the Durban City Council in the wrong.

The problem of Indians who had entered South Africa illegally strained Sastri's patience and diplomacy, exceedingly. It was more acute in the Transvaal, where Indians had to carry registration certificates. Some of these documents were obtained by fraudulent representations. Judicial decisions were at the time divided as to whether a registration certificate, once issued by the Government, could be revoked subsequently if it was proved to have been obtained fraudulently. Government legislated for a uniform policy and took power to cancel such certificates and deport illegal entrants, irrespective of the length of their stay in the country. It alarmed the illegal entrants, particularly those who had been long in the country and had built up business. There were also instances of Indians whose entry had been arranged, without their knowledge or connivance, by their friends and relations under fraudulent representations. These also were liable to deportation on discovery. Hitherto Government was very sparing in taking action

against illegal entrants, partly because of the difficulty of proving illegal entry and partly because of divergent judicial judgments. Under the new law Indians feared that, in the pursuit of the policy of reducing their number in the country, Government would embark on an all-out drive to ferret out illegal entrants and deport them wholesale. They argued that it was a violation of the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement of 1914 and the Cape Town Agreement of 1927. The matter was not discussed at the Round Table Conference, and Sastri did not know of the South African Government's intention. Only subsequently he learnt that it was discussed between some members of the two Delegations and had been agreed to!

Even before Sastri's arrival, Andrews had pleaded with the South African Government that mercy might temper justice. Mr. Patrick Duncan, Minister of the Interior in the previous Government of Smuts, had suggested in Parliament that illegal entrants should be condoned. Malan had promised condonation, subject to some reservations, to those who applied for it. He would do so by administrative orders rather than by legislation. It would be impossible to persuade Parliament to condone illegal entrants while promoting the reduction of the Indian population by Assisted Emigration. If Parliament rejected condonation, it would be impossible to grant it by administrative action of Government. Finally, as "an act of grace" to mark the appointment of Sastri as the first Agent, Malan offered administrative condonation, subject to some conditions.

The Transvaal Indian leaders rejected the advice of Andrews to accept the offer and insisted that the new law should be repealed or that no retrospective effect should be given to it, or, in the last resort, that the line should be drawn at 1914, the date of the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement. They also objected to the reservation that wives and minor children of condonees would not be permitted to enter the country.

It was argued, on the other side, that it was inequitable that illegal entrants should have the same rights as legal ones. The agreed policy of reducing the Indian population in the country would be defeated if illegal entrants were permitted to stay and also introduce their wives and minor children, thereby adding to the Indian population, present and potential. Most Indian traders did not care

for family life in South Africa; they left their wives and daughters in India and brought only their sons to help them in their businesses. Assisted Emigration would be availed of mostly by the poorer Indian labourers in Natal but not the comparatively well-to-do Indian traders in the Transvaal, the special target of anti-Indian agitation. Indian labourers were either invited to Natal under indenture or were born in the country. To the latter, India was a strange land. The traders entered the country voluntarily, and some of them fraudulently. It was the height of paradox that legally domiciled Indian labourers should be persuaded to migrate from South Africa, while illegal entrants should be permitted to stay and introduce their wives and minor children! Some Indians, particularly those born in South Africa, argued that the reduction of the Indian population could be more justly and economically secured by the deportation of illegal entrants than by the assisted emigration of legally domiciled Indians. The moneys spent on assisted emigration of innocents might be better used for their uplift in South Africa.

The South African Indian leaders claimed that the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement of 1914 had protected illegal entrants up to 1914 and accused the South African Government of violating it, and even contemplated offering *satyagraha*. On a reference to him, Mahatma Gandhi gave equivocal answers to categorical questions. He, however, appealed to the South African Government to draw the line at 1914, and advised Indians to accept Sastri's advice. Sastri failed to get a line drawn and advised Indians to accept the Government's offer as it stood.

Some Indians argued that the law prohibiting Indian immigration into South Africa was immoral and it was more honourable to violate it than to obey it. Sastri pointed out that, if the law was immoral, it should have been challenged openly. "It is not for people who have come here by the back-door to say that they did so in the exercise of a right. If they were exercising a right they ought to have come by the open door, announcing their arrival at the ports and thus challenging the propriety of the local laws."<sup>11</sup>

He was, however, able to secure a promise from Malan that, if the number be not large, wives and minor children of condonees would be permitted to enter the country. When

<sup>11</sup> *Indian Opinion*, September 21, 1928, p. 275.

at last the condonation scheme was finalised and accepted, Sastri and the officers of the South African Indian Congress toured the several provinces to persuade illegal entrants to clean up their past record and secure their future in the interests of themselves and the honour of India.

Assisted Emigration was the part of the Agreement which appealed most to the anti-Indians in South Africa. They presumed that Sastri would carry on a vigorous campaign to promote it. But he made it clear that Assisted Emigration was wholly voluntary and no pressure was to be applied by anybody one way or the other. His task was to explain the voluntary character of the scheme and the help that the Government of India would give at the Indian end. Malan concurred.

The Cape Town Agreement included a clause to say that the principle underlying the Industrial Conciliation Act and the Wages Act, which enabled all employees, including Indians, to take their place on the basis of equal pay for equal work, would be adhered to. At the time, Indians were excluded from recognised organisations like trade unions which were exclusively European. Parallel organisations were not permitted unless each was racially exclusive. Thus, if Indians formed a trade union, they must make it exclusively Indian. Indians, who were fighting segregation, had no desire to form such unions. The Natal Indian Congress organised a Natal Indian Trade Union Congress, which was subsequently named Natal Workers' Congress, to discuss such problems. Sastri had talks with the Government officials and trade union leaders concerned, white and Indian, and opened the Congress in a forceful speech. It decided to hold a joint conference subsequently with the European trade union representatives to persuade the latter to admit Indians. Sastri spoke at the joint conference also. It was agreed that a single union for each trade, open to all races, was the best method of organising trade unions. Before he left South Africa, Sastri had the good news that the Typographic Union in Durban opened its doors to Indians. Its action was endorsed by the parent body, the Typographic Union of South Africa, and publicly defended by the South African Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, who was, earlier, the President of the Union.

Besides securing the implementation of the specific provisions of the Cape Town Agreement concerning "Uplift,"



Sastri had often to intervene to protect some existing right and resist some new disability. Now and then, some action of a Provincial Government, a Municipality or other body would, deliberately or otherwise, threaten some existing right. For instance, the Liquor Bill, sponsored by Mr. Tielman Roos, Minister of Justice, would close the profession of waiters in hotels to Indians and throw out of employment those already serving in that capacity. Over three thousand Indians and their families were doomed to unemployment and distress. Roos was a confirmed anti-Asiatic, had spoken slightly of Sastri and had even refused to receive him, and was determined to oust the Indians in order to fill the vacancies with whites and reserve the profession for them. The proposal caused great alarm to the Indian community. Sastri saw Malan and Hertzog, but both hesitated to intervene effectively and asked Sastri to take his chance with Roos directly. Hertzog was, however, good enough to persuade Roos to meet Sastri. With much trepidation and anxiety and little hope, Sastri had an interview with Roos. He emerged smiling. Roos had very kindly offered to drop the offending clause in the Bill! Sastri promptly released the welcome news to the press, partly to commit Roos publicly. The Indian community, and particularly the Indian waiters, heaved a sigh of relief. It was a triumph not only of the personality and persuasiveness of Sastri but also of the Cape Town Agreement, for the offending section was criticised largely on the ground that it violated the Agreement.

European traders resented competition from Indian traders. The licensing authorities were Europeans, and they used their large powers to discriminate against the Indians. The law in the Transvaal left a narrow opening for the intervention of the courts. One anti-Indian member of the Transvaal Provincial Legislature wished to close that little opening also and gave notice of an amendment to the law. There was little doubt that it would be passed, for few members of the Legislature, if any, would dare to oppose it publicly. The threat threw the Indian traders into consternation, and they appealed to Sastri. The British press sympathised with the Indian cause. Sastri made representations to the Administrator of the Transvaal, who agreed to help. But his intervention was rendered unnecessary because the amendment lapsed for want of the mover. On the very

day that he was to move his amendment, its author was arrested by the police for violating a local law which prohibited sex intercourse between persons of different races! The Indian traders were saved for the time being.

While no frontal attack was made on the Agreement, there was more or less continuous anti-Indian sniping. Again and again, Sastri had to intervene to stave off or mitigate an impending blow. His growing influence had paradoxically intensified anti-Indian feeling in some quarters. The laws of the Transvaal, made during the days of the Boer Republic, prohibited Indians from owning or occupying some categories of land in the mining areas. But they were not strictly enforced, and the authorities openly and indulgently connived at their *de facto* violation. In consequence, Indians had come to own or occupy prohibited areas and for long periods. Some European traders invoked the musty old laws against Indian traders and disqualified them to receive or renew trading licences in the areas. In consequence, the Johannesburg Municipality was obliged to withhold renewal of some hundreds of Indian trade licences. On the intervention of Sastri, the Municipal authorities tacitly permitted the Indian traders to trade without licences, pending some way out of the difficulty. The Indian traders were thereby saved from certain ruin. While the authorities were thus accommodating, some European traders felt alarmed and moved the courts to declare Indian occupation of prohibited land illegal and to render them ineligible to trade licences. The situation became alarming on the eve of Sastri's departure.

It was implicit in the promise of uplift that racial discrimination in land and trade should be eliminated. But the Agreement itself noted that action far in advance of effective white opinion was not feasible. It was not possible even for Sastri during his short stay of eighteen months in South Africa to secure the reform. But he welcomed every step, however small, in the desired direction. For instance, under the Transvaal law, Indians could not own landed property even for temples and mosques. It happened that the nominal European owner of a Hindu temple went bankrupt, and the land and temple were auctioned as *his* property! The Indians, who had already paid for them, had to buy them again in the auction and register them in the name of another European! He too went bankrupt, and

the process was repeated. And the Hindus prayed as never before for the continued solvency of the latest European *de jure* owner! At the instance of Sastri, the Government offered to own such land on behalf of the Indian community and act as its trustee.

Non-Europeans were fair game for Europeans, by and large. European political parties vied with one another, particularly at elections, in proposing unfair discriminations against non-Europeans. It happened that a member of the Transvaal Provincial Legislature introduced a bill to prohibit African chauffeurs from driving cars or buses occupied by Europeans on the ground that they were unreliable and would cause accidents to Europeans. But the real object was to provide more jobs for whites. A great many Europeans employed African chauffeurs because they were cheaper and more accommodating, and did not wish to replace them by whites. But the members of the Legislature dared not oppose the Bill, lest they should be accused of being pro-African and lose their next elections. So they unanimously supported it publicly in the Legislature and privately requested the Administrator to veto it! On the Administrator declining to oblige them, they privately appealed to the Central Government and the Governor-General to veto it!

Sastri helped to organise the Indian Social Service League and the Indian Child Welfare Society. They won the sympathy of the Durban Municipal Corporation and particularly of its Medical Officer of Health, as well as of some European ladies. He also inaugurated the Indo-European Joint Councils in Durban and Johannesburg to promote mutual understanding and respect. They rendered good service. For instance, the Council in Johannesburg publicly interceded on behalf of the Indian waiters in hotels when they were threatened with unemployment by Roos's legislation. The Bishop of Johannesburg, as a member of the Council, administered a public rebuke to the South African Government for contemplating such grave injustice to innocent Indian waiters. Sastri himself advised the Indian members not to expect the European members to identify themselves fully with the Indians; it would be expecting too much, and it would weaken their influence with their own European community.

Sastri's main purpose was to win support for the Cape

Town Agreement and its "Uplift" clause and create a mental climate less hostile, if not more favourable, to Indians, without hurting the Europeans. To this end he was constantly on tour, addressing meetings, expounding the Agreement and winning toleration, if not support. The response was generally encouraging.

The attitude, however, of the South African Party, led by Smuts, caused concern. While the Agreement was debated in the South African Parliament, Smuts refrained from blessing it, though his next-in-command, Patrick Duncan, gave his support. From the point of party politics, the Agreement gave Smuts a most tempting stick with which to beat the Government of Hertzog. The latter had promised to deal with Indians more drastically than the Government of Smuts. Instead, it cut a somersault, as it were, and offered to uplift Indians! At its annual conference at Bloemfontein, the South African Party, at the instance of its Natal members, the chief supporters of Smuts, passed resolutions favouring the maintenance of restrictions on Asiatic immigration and of Government assistance for permanent repatriation, but made no reference to uplift! It was ominous.

Sastri was anxious to raise the Agreement above party politics and commit the South African Party also to it. He, therefore, proposed to celebrate its first anniversary with a banquet on February 21, 1928, and hoped that Smuts would attend, and, thereby, enable the Governor-General to preside to emphasise the national, rather than the party, character of the Agreement. He personally invited Smuts to the banquet, but the latter declined. In consequence, the Governor-General was unable to preside. Hertzog presided and gave cordial support to the Agreement. Malan was somewhat cautious. Patrick Duncan of the South African Party attended and gave his unreserved support to the Agreement.

Some time later, in October 1928, Smuts made a public attack on the Agreement; rather, he pilloried the Hertzog Government for concluding it. He was reported to have said: "The Nationalist Party came to power on the policy of compulsory repatriation of Indians. Instead, it signed the Cape Town Agreement, which gave Indians firmer ground under foot than they had ever before." And then he paid a reluctant tribute to Sastri:

"They have even an Ambassador here in the person of Mr. Sastri. He had felt Sastri's steel at the Imperial Conference in 1921. He was not surprised that Mr. Sastri proved too clever for the Government of Hertzog. Mr. Sastri was probably the most honoured man in South Africa. When any important function was held or any important lecture given, Mr. Sastri was invited. It was right, too; he was one of the ablest speakers and one of the cleverest men."<sup>12</sup>

Next morning the *Cape Times*, the chief organ of the South African Party of Smuts, came out with a slashing attack on Smuts for his "mischievous" speech against the Agreement and protested that, if the Government of Hertzog had done one good thing during its régime, it was the Cape Town Agreement. Its Editor received congratulations from a large circle. Malan also severely criticised Smuts for his speech. He was very much surprised that Smuts touched upon this question at all. If he had any criticism to offer he should have offered it, as Leader of the Opposition, in Parliament. The Agreement was discussed two or three times in Parliament, and on no occasion did he open his mouth. On the other hand, Mr. Patrick Duncan, who was formerly the Minister responsible, approved of the Agreement and admitted that it was one of the best things that could be done in the interests of the country.<sup>13</sup>

As a vital part of his mission to create a better appreciation of India and a more favourable attitude towards the Indians in South Africa, Sastri welcomed opportunities offered to him to speak at Universities, colleges, clubs, churches and public meetings on Indian thought and life and drew record audiences. He spoke on such subjects as *Rama and Sita*, *Bhishma*, *Sakuntala*, *Vedanta*, the *Gita*, and *Gandhi*. Sir Curruthers Beatty, the Vice-Chancellor of the Cape Town University, with folded hands, introduced Sastri as "the Master." Sastri spoke in the Cathedral in Johannesburg and to the ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church in Cape Town on "Christ and Christianity." Presiding over his lecture on *Sakuntala* at the Witwaterarad University, Mr. J. H. Hofmeyr, the Administrator of the Transvaal, said: "Perhaps the most important feature of Mr. Sastri's

<sup>12</sup> *Indian Opinion*, November 2, 1928, p. 326.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, November 16, 1928, p. 341.

ambassadorship in South Africa has been his interpretation of India and the Indian people.”<sup>14</sup> Mahatma Gandhi took a similar view in *Young India* of October 18, 1928: “These lectures are perhaps his greatest and most permanent contribution to the Indian cause in South Africa.”

Sastri had agreed to serve as Agent in South Africa for one year. Before the expiry of that period, insistent pressure was brought to bear on him from all sides in India and South Africa to continue for at least another year. Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Sastri from Sabarmati on February 26, 1928:

“Already urgent letters are being received to implore you not to leave South Africa at the end of your year. They say you are already counting your months. And they are trembling in their shoes, and more than they, am I trembling, and perhaps my trembling is weightier because of the absence of shoes! For, I really feel that, except for grave reasons of health, it would be a national tragedy for you to leave South Africa at the present moment. And I am sorry to have to say—but it is true—that no one else can successfully replace you at the present moment. . . . You may not desert them. Do please therefore let me have a reassuring letter.”<sup>15</sup>

Even the *Natal Mercury*, the least sympathetic among British papers, pleaded that Sastri should prolong his stay, at least till after the general elections when his services would be needed most.

The Mahatma’s intervention settled the matter once again. Sastri agreed, but to stay for six months only and no longer. Finally, he left Durban on January 28, 1929. The boat was delayed for three hours in order to enable his admirers, European and Indian, to give him a fitting send-off.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Indian Opinion*, October 19, 1928, p. 311.

<sup>15</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> P. Kodanda Rao’s Diary, January 28, 1929.

*BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS*

SASTRI's mission in South Africa was unique in many respects. Both Mahatma Gandhi and the Government of India were united in persuading him to accept the office of the Agent. His acceptance was acclaimed by all concerned in India and South Africa, official and non-official, European and Indian. The President of the Servants of India and a politician who prized his right to criticise the Government, became, at least technically, a civil servant of that Government, subject to its service discipline, though in practice he was given as much latitude as he cared for. The representative of the Government of India in South Africa, he undertook the task of winning the support of South African citizens to the Cape Town Agreement which the South African Government concluded and which it was its duty to put across in South Africa. A civil servant, he had little administrative work; instead, he was engaged mostly in political work in South Africa. In addition, he lectured extensively on Indian Philosophy and Literature!

On arrival in South Africa he found the Agreement ill-understood or misunderstood, and, in Natal, unequivocally repudiated. When he left the country eighteen months later, the Agreement was better understood, widely approved and partly implemented. He brought about a palpable change in the mental climate of the ruling race in the country, less hostile, if not more friendly, to Indians. The transformation in his own personal status was remarkable to a degree. The man whom Smuts refused to receive on a par with a European in 1919 and whom he warned off from South Africa in 1921, was acknowledged by the same Smuts in 1928 as the most honoured man in South Africa! The

*Pretoria News* contrasted the situations when he arrived and when he left. "His reception was cool where it was not hostile and suspicious. But these eighteen months have been one of continuous personal conquest. With his presence here, with all his gifts of character, diplomacy, speech and culture, the barriers of prejudice which threatened to hamper his services melted rapidly away."

An unfortunate and isolated incident in Klerksdorp in the Transvaal in September, 1928, gave occasion for spontaneous expressions of appreciation of Sastri and his work. The small local Indian community organised a banquet in a European hotel and a public meeting thereafter at the Town Hall, which were presided over by the Mayor and attended by almost all the leading whites and Indians. At the banquet, the Mayor's toast to Sastri was received with musical honours. The Deputy Mayor had declined the invitation to the banquet. Instead, he parked himself in his car in front of the hotel while the banquet-guests were arriving and displayed big anti-Indian posters. One of them said: "Are you going to assist the coolie uplift at the expense of our boys? Curse you!" On the way to the Town Hall, the Mayor whispered a friendly hint to Sastri to expect some demonstration from the Deputy Mayor at the public meeting. The Deputy Mayor and his friends had entered the hall earlier and occupied the front seats reserved for the banquet-guests. As the Mayor and Sastri entered the hall, there was some booing and hooting. The Mayor, in introducing Sastri, pleaded for order and decorum. Sastri began his speech on the significance of the Cape Town Agreement and said that Indians should not be called "coolies." The Deputy Mayor stood up and protested against whites listening to an Indian. Some in the audience asked him to sit down. The Mayor again pleaded for order and courtesy. Then the lights went out and a stink bomb burst near the platform. Some friends rushed to the spot to smother the offensive fumes with their overcoats. Sastri's staff rushed to shield him from harm. Most of the audience kept their seats and called out in the darkness: "Go on, Mr. Sastri." Sastri responded: "Yes, I am here, and I will go on." Soon the lights were restored. The Deputy Mayor and his friends had fled during the darkness. The meeting was adjourned to the open to avoid the lingering fumes in the Hall. In requesting Sastri to resume his speech, the Mayor pro-



foundly apologised to him. Superbly calm and unperturbed and gently smiling, Sastri resumed his speech, as if nothing had happened. In proposing the vote of thanks, the speaker recalled Agrippa's declaration after hearing St. Paul's address: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." He added that the audience must feel better for hearing the speech, and that those who designed and executed the insult upon the community and had left, had apparently been afraid that they too would be persuaded by the eloquence and wisdom of Sastri. He ended by saying that Indians should be regarded as South Africans and it was up to the whites to make the best possible South Africans of them.

Immediately after returning to the hotel, Sastri retired to bed. The police, however, kept vigil in and around the hotel for they had reason to suspect that two men had entered it with a tin of petrol to burn down the building if Sastri stayed in it for the night and to burn the cars in which he and his party travelled.

Commenting on Sastri's cool temper during the incident, a correspondent wrote in the *Pretoria News*: "Quite the best thing of the week, I think, was the remark made by Mr. Sastri after the rumpus in Klerksdorp: 'I was going to speak, when we changed our venue, on another phase of the Agreement.' There was a calm Olympian humour about the remark that is worthy of Curzon or Asquith at his best. . . . Mr. Sastri's coolness recalls the old Norse Legend. Thor takes the hammer and strikes the sleeping Skrymir a blow on the forehead. Skrymir opens his eyes, passes his hand across his forehead and says: 'Did a leaf fall?'"<sup>1</sup>

News agencies flashed the incident. Messages poured in. Among the first were those from Malan and Hertzog condemning the insult to Sastri and India and congratulating Sastri on his safety. The South African Government apologised to the Government of India and promised to take action against the perpetrators of the outrage. Sastri, however, suggested that no importance need be attached to the incident and promptly cabled the Government of India to ignore it.

The Deputy Mayor of Klerksdorp subsequently defended his share in the incident on the ground that something had to be done to save the whites from Sastri. "As an African-der, I take it as an insult and a disgrace that Mr. Sastri, as

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Opinion*, September 28, 1928, p. 288.

the Ambassador of India, was ever allowed to go beyond the compass of his office and tour the country and use his tremendous oratorical influence to turn the heads of our people."<sup>2</sup> He found support in Mr. Oswald Pirow, K.C., M.L.A., and the *Ous Vaderland*, a Boer paper in Pretoria. While deploring the disorder at the meeting, Pirow violently attacked Malan for apologising to Sastri, and repeated his regret that the Nationalist Government of Hertzog and Malan gave the "coolie" in South Africa a leader like Sastri, and that Nationalist leaders acted as chairmen at dinners in honour of that leader. *Ous Vaderland* felt bound by the Cape Town Agreement but objected to the round of entertainments in honour of Sastri and the compliments paid to him—"things to which we in the Transvaal are not accustomed." It recalled that no apologies were forthcoming for similar incidents in the past concerning "Mr. Gandhi, a man more important than Mr. Sastri, Mr. Gokhale and Mrs. Naidu." It suggested that no action be taken against the miscreants.<sup>3</sup>

The British press severely condemned the outrage, and took occasion to appreciate Sastri's personality and services not only to Indians but to South Africa as a whole. The *Natal Witness* wrote: "Fortunately, as far as this country is concerned, the outrage has merely gone to emphasise the great esteem in which Mr. Sastri is held by all parties and the friendly disposition of the Union towards the cause he so ably advocates." The *Natal Advertiser* was indignant. It said: "Rotten eggs and stink bombs do not hinder the Indian cause. They help it. The hooligans of Klerksdorp did not win. Mr. Sastri won. Is it to be wondered that the nasty-minded illiterates of Klerksdorp give mouth like howling curs when a great man tries to put the case with convincing advocacy for a depressed people, struggling to break the bonds of an age-old mental and economic repression?" The *Rand Daily Mail* of Johannesburg, after condemning the outrage in severe terms, continued: "Actually South Africa is under a sense of the very deepest obligation to Mr. Sastri. To him probably more than to any one else belongs the credit for establishing those cordial relations which made possible the Indo-African Agreement and brought to a solution a problem which had been a most

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Opinion*, October 19, 1928, p. 309.

<sup>3</sup> *Servant of India*, October 18, 1928, p. 557.

vexing one for many years. . . .

"During his stay he has given his time ungrudgingly to the furtherance of intellectual causes, and we are, in consequence, the richer for the ripe wisdom and high idealism which have been the distinguishing features of the many addresses he has delivered throughout the country."

The *Star* of Johannesburg said that, in view of the strong colour prejudice, it was all the more remarkable that such different and improved relationship had come into being between the Union Government and the Indians since the advent of Sastri. That the changed aspect was due to his personality and learning could not be denied. The political impression that this one man had made on officialdom in South Africa could hardly be exaggerated: he was a statesman of the first rank in the British Empire, whose unique training and natural gifts commanded respect wherever he might be. The incident was obviously caused by fear of change which had already advanced so far as to have almost revolutionised the "Indian question" in South Africa—which was not the same thing as saying, it has solved all its human problems.

Some British papers became so friendly to Sastri that he had to request them to be occasionally critical lest they should be dubbed pro-Indian and thereby lose their influence with the European community and weaken their capacity to help the Indians. On occasions, the Indian Agency furnished leading articles for some papers.

Sastri was more a statesman than a civil servant and was allowed considerable latitude not only by the Government of India but also by the Government of South Africa. The *Star* of Johannesburg commented: "Mr. Sastri had an individual charm and grace of manner which enabled him to handle almost any topic without offence. But many of the topics, to which he was repeatedly recurring in South Africa, would have made an orthodox diplomat's hair stand on end. It was the secret of his success."<sup>4</sup> On occasions, Sastri took the liberty of reading a lesson to the South African Government, and it was accepted in good spirit. Indeed, Hertzog once claimed that the only man with whom he felt spiritually connected was Sastri.<sup>5</sup>

When finally Sastri left South Africa the press and the

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Opinion*, July 4, 1929, p. 220.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, March 1, 1929, p. 79.

public vied with each other in paying tributes to his personality and his services not only to Indians in South Africa but also to South Africa as a whole. The *Natal Witness* said: "It is not too much to say, in fact, that he is one of the world's few statesmen." The *Cape Times* said that Sastri would be terribly missed in South Africa where his influence had been a triumph, principally of his personality. The whole South African idea of India and her people had been greatly altered since he had been at work in South Africa.

"It need hardly be said that when Mr. Sastri has spoken in public the effect of his eloquence has been immense. He is among the greatest living speakers in the English tongue, a natural orator, with a most effective delivery. Slowly, with a sure choice of words, his speeches drop upon the ear, each sentence verbally perfect. The thought that he is expressing turns itself, without hesitation or fumbling, into graceful yet forcible language. Cape Town will remember for many years how his addresses in the University Hall drew great audiences to listen to him and come away lost in admiration of his speaking. These gifts have, of course, been the foundation of the immense popular impression that he has made in South Africa. . . . South Africans in authority have learnt to have confidence in Mr. Sastri. They know that his word is trustworthy. They admire his intellectual gifts. They have come to appreciate his simplicity and charm as a man. They have shared the glamour of his sense of humour; simple in essence, strangely complex and subtle in grain."<sup>6</sup>

The *Rand Daily Mail*, Johannesburg, said that Sastri was not only one of the great orators of our time, but also a great idealist and a great statesman. He was largely responsible for the Cape Town Agreement, which represented a change of heart in South Africa so far as the Indian section of the population was concerned, which was little short of miraculous. That in itself was a wonderful tribute to the persuasive and pacificatory powers of Mr. Sastri. India had never had so fine an interpreter. He had created in South Africa an entirely new atmosphere towards his own land and its peoples, and he had made conditions incomparably better for the Indians resident in the Union. He had placed the whole South African community under a heavy debt of

<sup>6</sup> *Indian Opinion*, January 18, 1929, p. 27.

gratitude to him by his interpretation of Eastern Philosophy and his personal demonstration of the serenity and loftiness of mind which comes from the constant contemplation of the things of the spirit. "Mr. Sastri's stay amongst us has been a great intellectual and moral stimulus to the South African community, and for that as well as for his great personal charm and distinguished statesmanship he will always be remembered with affection, not only by those who enjoyed the privilege of his friendship but also by all who had the happy experience of hearing or reading those remarkable speeches of his which afforded so many vivid glimpses of a mind which is a veritable store-house of learning."<sup>7</sup>

The *Natal Mercury*, which was always bitterly anti-Indian and which counted a repatriated Indian as the only good Indian, said: "There is very genuine regret that we are no longer to have the privilege of Mr. Sastri's acquaintance, nor the touch of his statesmanship, which has ensured the smooth working of that Agreement from its inception to the present day. . . . That we see India with a broader vision today, that our relations with her are more happily established is due to the great gifts which Mr. Sastri has brought to bear on the delicate position he has occupied."<sup>8</sup>

The *Natal Advertiser* of Durban went further and spoke of Sastri's "brilliant reign" in South Africa:

"There was the brilliant reign—for one can justly call it a reign—of Mr. Sastri. . . . Governments as a rule, and least of all British Governments, do not do inspired things. Yet, the choice of Mr. Sastri as the first Agent in the Union was as nearly a stroke of genius as anything may be. . . . It would be easy to lapse into eulogy over Mr. Sastri, though it would be difficult to praise him above his worth. Yet this remains true that during his stay in the Union he is, without question, the greatest man in South Africa, the ablest orator, the shrewdest diplomat, and withal, the most accomplished interpreter of the civilisation of India that we have ever had in our midst. . . . Mr. Sastri has compelled the homage of the Europeans of the Union. . . . But the Agent-General has not taken that homage to himself. He has insisted on its being shared, or at least passed on, to his depressed people in this country."

<sup>7</sup> *Indian Opinion*, January 18, 1929, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, February 8, 1929, p. 57.

The *Indian Opinion*, edited by the late Manilal Gandhi, son of Mahatma Gandhi, was somewhat critical of Sastri because he did not advocate *satyagraha* by South African Indians to redress their wrongs. It said: "We respectfully differ from Mr. Sastri on some matters. . . . His moderation and forbearance are at times, we think, far too stretched, but we know he is absolutely sincere. His heart is too soft to see suffering on either side. He would wish to gain for us things without our having to suffer. We believe, however, that nothing can be achieved without suffering. . . . Nevertheless, Mr. Sastri is a great man. The European press and the people of South Africa have almost unanimously hailed Mr. Sastri as being the greatest man in South Africa today. . . . Mr. Sastri will be leaving these shores with a feeling that all is not quite well in South Africa. He has, however, done more than his duty, and for that the community is greatly indebted to him." It paid a well-merited tribute to Mrs. Sastri: "We may not forget the great sacrifice on the part of Mrs. Sastri in allowing Mr. Sastri to remain with us for such a long period. Her sacrifice is as great in sending Mr. Sastri to us as is Mr. Sastri's in coming to us. Nay, it is even greater, for which the community owes a deep debt of gratitude to her." The Rt. Rev. Bishop A. B. L. Karney of Johannesburg, in his monthly letter in his diocesan magazine, *Watchman*, said: "It was my privilege to entertain Mr. Sastri, and in other ways I have seen a great deal of him. He is certainly one of the greatest men I have met. His extraordinary liberality of mind, his fair-mindedness, his philosophic outlook on life, wedded to a passionate love of India, with strong loyalty to the British Empire—there is a combination of qualities rare indeed. Few who heard him will forget his magnificent appeal for justice, for the freeing of all racial questions from the toils of party politics. God grant that our first-rank politicians will read his words and weigh them well." The Very Rev. Dean Palmer was moved to say: "I speak with full deliberation when I say that if ever a man was sent by God at the right time and to the right place, it is Mr. Sastri. He is an apostle of reconciliation. He has made India a reality to us."

Before he left South Africa, Sastri had the satisfaction of bringing about more cordial social relations between the whites and Indians. He attended as often as possible the weekly luncheons at the Orient Club, a country club, owned

by Indians. At his instance, the habit of inviting prominent Europeans was formed. On January 8, 1929, some leading Europeans in Johannesburg organised a farewell banquet for Sastri in the Carlton Hotel. The guests included over twenty Indian men and women—the first such occasion. It may be recalled that even Sastri was not allowed in the Carlton Hotel when he arrived in South Africa!

Even more significant was the luncheon party given by the Durban Municipal Corporation. It was presided over by the Mayor, who was known for his very pronounced anti-Indian views. A determined segregationist, he had done his utmost to deny the site for the Sastri College inside the Borough of Durban and was much disgruntled by the Indian Housing Report which put the Durban Corporation in the wrong. During one of his morning walks, Sastri happened to pass his home. He paused, hesitated a moment and then rang the door-bell. He had a short chat with the Mayor and disarmed him.

Commenting on Sastri's command of the English language, the *Pretoria News* observed: "It is a curious thing that the two best English speakers we have in South Africa are not Englishmen—one is a Dutchman, Hofmeyr, and the other is an Indian, Sastri. . . . Hofmeyr has the easier style—he is fast and free, while Mr. Sastri is slow and deliberate; but Mr. Sastri had the Asquithian gift of compression, which goes along with the choice of the inevitable word." Sastri was amused when a European lady enquired of a member of his staff if he knew English and the number of wives he had!

On the eve of his departure from Pretoria, Sastri was entertained at a farewell dinner by Prime Minister Hertzog. Soon after greeting the guests, Hertzog went to the wine-table and, turning towards Sastri, asked: "What will you have, Mr. Sastri?" Quick came the response: "General, both of us will go to jail." Hertzog was taken aback and wondered why. Smiling, Sastri reminded him that they were in the Transvaal in which province it was an offence for an Asiatic to consume liquor and for a white man to offer it to an Asiatic! Hertzog felt abashed and confused for a moment, and joined Sastri in laughing it out.

Sastri spoke several times to the Durban Library Group on Indian subjects, philosophical, literary and social and presented it a small library of books on India. The Group

opened its doors to Indians, unlike the Public Library. On the suggestion of Sastri, the Maharaja of Mysore presented a baby elephant to the Durban Zoo. It was a welcome attraction to the visitors, particularly, children. The *Cape Times* organised a fund to buy a bust of Sastri made by the young sculptor, Mr. M. Kottler. Mr. and Mrs. Kottler were among the ardent admirers of Sastri in South Africa, and later in London.

When Sir Mahomed Habibulla learnt that Sastri had finally decided to return to India, he offered him the title of K.C.S.I. In the course of his letter of October 20, 1928, he wrote: "I am aware that no distinction can be too great for one possessing your dignity and eminence, and no title commensurate with your unselfish and inimitable labours in the field in which you are now engaged. . . . But, let me assure you, my dear Sastri, that I cannot be happy until I shall have discharged my duty in this respect. If, as I fervently hope, you are prepared to fall in with my ideas, I shall submit your name for the award of a K.C.S.I. in the next year's Honours List as a token, though feeble and inadequate, of your noble work in the cause of our motherland. I shall deem it a personal favour if you will be good enough to send me a cable expressing your agreement with my suggestion." Sastri hesitated for a moment as he thought of Mrs. Sastri. He had received enough honours and distinctions, but so far none that he could share with her, whose only portion was sacrifice. If he accepted the K.C.S.I., Mrs. Sastri would become Lady Sastri. For her sake, he even wished that he had not been consulted. But having been consulted, he firmly and respectfully declined. In the course of his reply, dated November 30, 1928, he wrote:

"Believe me, the approbation of friends, especially the Viceroy and yourself, is ample reward for such services as I have been privileged to do. I recognise the very high distinction proposed for me; but I cannot overcome the feeling that it is somewhat out of range of one who occupies a humble station in life. In communicating my wish to remain undistinguished, may I beg respectfully that my motive be not misunderstood?"

On January 1, 1930, Sastri was made a "Companion of Honour" by the British Sovereign, and the formal investiture took place in Delhi on March 28, 1930, at the hands



of the Viceroy.

Sastri kept Mahatma Gandhi constantly informed of the progress of events in South Africa and sent him, in strict confidence, copies of his official despatches to the Government of India. The Mahatma fully appreciated the difficulties that faced Sastri and his achievements in spite of them.

Both while he was in South Africa and after his return to India, Sastri was subjected to adverse criticism by some Indians, some of which was pretty virulent. It was partly due to the fact that, though Mahatma Gandhi fully supported his policies in South Africa, Sastri was opposed to the Mahatma's policies in India. The *Indian Opinion*, which is more competent to assess Sastri's work in South Africa than some critics in India, said: "It is apparent that the attack has been directed to Mr. Sastri, not that he was unsuccessful in his mission in the country, but that he has been and is a moderate in Indian politics."<sup>9</sup>

Sastri was criticised partly because of his consent to Assisted Emigration and the limited scheme of condonation of illegal entrants. It is unnecessary here to repeat what has already been said about them. Assisted Emigration was a part of the Agreement as much as Uplift, and both were equally binding on all concerned. Nothing would have given greater satisfaction to Sastri or Mahatma Gandhi or the Government and people of India and the South African Indians than that the South African Government did not insist on the reduction of the Indian population in the Union. Gokhale and Gandhi felt obliged to countenance repatriation. From the point of view of Indian self-respect, Assisted Emigration was an improvement on repatriation. Sastri was vigilant to see that the voluntary character of the scheme was respected. He would have been pleased if there had been a general amnesty to all illegal entrants. He was also criticised on the ground that he did not press for the right of free immigration of Indians to South Africa. He reminded his critics that, in view of past history and the then situation and on the authority of Gokhale and Gandhi, it would be suicidal for Indians to reopen the subject of free emigration in the Empire at that stage. It has not been possible even now, when India is an independent Republic.

Another criticism was that he did not countenance

<sup>9</sup> *Indian Opinion*, April 12, 1929, p. 125.

Indians making common cause with Africans to form a united non-European front. He pointed out that, if they did so, they would make it difficult, if not impossible, for the Government of India to champion their cause in South Africa. The Africans were South Africans, and it was not constitutionally possible for the Government of India, as then constituted, to intervene directly on their behalf. Since that Government was a party to the introduction of Indian indentured immigrants to Natal and as long as some of them were alive, India had continuing responsibility for their welfare, particularly as they had no political or municipal franchise. But for the Cape Town Agreement, India would have very slender right to intervene on behalf of Indians born in South Africa. Also, South Africa hoped to secure a reduction of its Indian population by assisted emigration, largely to India, and with the cooperation of the Government of India. The Government of India could not offer any similar inducement to the South African Government with respect to the Africans. Further, Sastri was in South Africa in terms of the Cape Town Agreement and as the Agent of the Government of India, and could not possibly go beyond the Indian, and champion the African, cause.

But that did not prevent informal contacts and cooperation between the two communities. Sastri approved of African representatives attending the South African Indian Congress meetings as fraternal delegates. He also took several occasions to point out with diplomatic delicacy that the "Uplift" clause in the Cape Town Agreement was not limited to Indians alone, for the South African Government undertook to uplift "every section of their permanent population to the full extent of their capacity and opportunities." Indeed, some of the white opposition to the "Uplift" clause in the Agreement was due to the realisation that it applied to the Africans also, and might be invoked tomorrow, if not today.

The position has changed radically since the days of Sastri's Agentship. India has been able to move the United Nations on behalf of Indians in South Africa under the Cape Town Agreement, a treaty between two members of the United Nations. She has also been able to champion the cause of Africans and all non-Europeans in South Africa under the Charter of the United Nations which forbids

discrimination based on race. Indians and Africans have made common cause in South Africa, but their status has not yet improved in spite of it.

But perhaps the chief offence of Sastri in the eyes of some of his most determined Indian critics was his appreciation of the British Empire, particularly when Mahatma Gandhi had denounced the Government of India as "satanic" and was engaged in a non-violent Non-cooperation with it. Sastri's action seemed to be in bad taste, if not treason to India.

As has already been stated, Sastri believed in the British Empire, rather its ideals and its enlightened trends, notwithstanding some of its policies which he thoroughly disapproved and vehemently criticised. Nobody excelled Sastri in his denunciation of the British Government's racial policies in Kenya or its support to the Rowlatt Acts, to mention just two instances. On one occasion he even walked out of the Indian Legislative Council as a protest against a ruling of the Viceroy-President. At the Viceregal Banquet in his honour on the eve of his Dominion tour, he shocked the Viceroy and his British colleagues by telling them to their face that he never knew British prestige in India fall so low as then. He was no blind admirer of the British Empire.

Mahatma Gandhi claimed Gokhale as his political *guru*. Gokhale, in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Servants of India Society, which he founded in 1905, claimed that it was Divine dispensation which brought India within the British Empire for India's good. Even while engaged in Non-cooperation, Mahatma Gandhi resisted pleas that Indians should quit the British Empire and avowed his high faith in British institutions, notwithstanding his bitter experience in South Africa and in India. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who suffered much at the hands of the Government of India and was one of its most bitter critics, proclaimed as late as 1920 his faith in the British Empire and his loyalty to its sovereign. Speaking of Home Rule for India in 1918, he said: "It does not mean snapping the connection between England and India; it does not mean disclaiming the suzerain power of the King-Emperor. On the contrary, it affirms and strengthens both.... Indians did want English people, English institutions, English liberty and Empire.... It has been well said that British Rule is

conferring inestimable benefit on India. . . . I do not believe that if we had any other rulers except the liberty-loving British, they could have conceived and assisted us in developing such a National ideal. Every one who has the interests of India at heart is fully alive to this and similar advantages of British rule; and the present crisis is, in my opinion, a blessing inasmuch as it had universally evoked our united feelings and sentiments of loyalty to the British throne."

It was only in December, 1929, that the Indian National Congress, under the presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, contemplated the contingency of India quitting the Empire. Even after India attained independence and became a Republic, Nehru preferred to remain in the Commonwealth. Even after the British invasion of Egypt in 1956, which India strongly disapproved, Nehru stood by the Commonwealth, in spite of mounting pressure to the contrary. Among his arguments was that the Commonwealth was a union of States and a going concern, and that it was not worth while to break it up, even if some of the members differed pretty violently on certain matters as racialism. Sastri's attitude towards the British Empire in the twenties was no treasonable departure from that of Gokhale, Gandhi and Tilak, and was hardly distinguishable from that of Nehru since Independence. The Empire should be improved rather than shunned. Sastri did not allow the permanent values of the Empire to be overlooked, while resenting its passing inequities; he would not throw away the baby with the bath-water.

Expediency reinforced principle. India had no effective sanctions against South Africa, except persuasive diplomacy. Sastri himself belonged to a race despised by the ruling race in South Africa; he belonged also to a subject nation, a British dependency. He had no power, no patronage, no tempting concessions to offer to the South African ruling race. He would have pleased it most if he had undertaken to persuade the bulk of Indians in that country to emigrate. In so far as he declined to act as recruiting agent for assisted emigration and safeguarded its voluntary character, he was far from humouring the whites. The "Uplift" policy did not appeal to them. And yet, it fell to him to persuade the ruling race to embark on the uplift of the Indians. It was an uphill task. His only sanctions were his

own personal charm, his superb command of the English language and his cross-bench mind, which was more judicial than partisan. His membership of the Privy Council was a help; it almost automatically gave him the status of a Cabinet Minister in South Africa, which, incidentally, enabled him to travel in a railway saloon reserved for Cabinet Ministers and which saved him and the South African Government from embarrassing situations and ugly incidents in railway travel, at any rate at the outset.

But his most effective appeal in South Africa, at least to the British section, was his presentation of the ideals of the Empire. He won over the British whites. In almost every speech, particularly in Natal which is about hundred per cent British in stock and sentiment, he held up the highest ideals of the Empire and exhorted the ruling race to live up to them. In concluding his major policy speech in Durban on July 16, 1927, he said:

"I trust rather to the character of this Province, the most British of all the provinces of South Africa [Applause] to maintain the high and honourable traditions of the British race. I know with what valour, with what passion and devotion you fought for the inclusion of the Union Jack in the National Flag. Shall it be said that when you honour and revere the British flag, you do so only for the political gains and advantages it brings and that you do not remember what it also stands for in the way of chivalry and fair play, the guarantee of freedom it conveys to the peoples who come under it? I look to you in whom I strike a note of sympathy not to remain silent when the battle rages, not to fold your hands and say 'there goes a wrong turn.' Let your voices be heard and let your noble thoughts be expressed. Do not be ashamed of them, do not be afraid of them, but let them be sounded to the world as a call to duty and you will find that when truth raises her voice injustice must flee. Let us all march forward like brothers in honourable and peaceful citizenship to fulfil the noble destiny of the British Commonwealth of Nations. You, who are in political power, and we, who have it not, you, who can give help, and we, who need it, —we shall all march forward, brothers, unashamed of each other, sharing in common tasks of high endeavour and high hope." [Applause]<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Indian Opinion*, July 22, 1927, p. 205.

The *Natal Mercury*, a confirmed anti-Indian paper of Durban, thus commented on Sastri's speech on the Empire Sentiment in Durban on September 8, 1927: "In an address, the keynote of which was a glowing patriotism, Mr. Srinivasa Sastri, the Agent in South Africa for the Government of India, aroused a hundred per cent British audience to a high emotional tension in the Town Hall last night. Seldom indeed have Durban people been privileged to listen to such remarkable oratory and seldom has the ideal of the Empire been defined to them in so cultured and inspired a manner."<sup>11</sup>

Sastri's speech to Britishers at Pietermaritzburg, Natal, on August 11, 1927, was the high-water mark of his British Empire sentiment. It made every Britisher a better Britisher, if only for the time being. Robert Dunlop, writing to the *Natal Witness* about the speech, said:

"Every Britisher present must have wished that Messrs. Malan, Roos and other rabid Nationalists, who in season and out of season seek to weaken the connection of South Africa with the Empire, could have been present to hear the statesmanlike appreciation of the value of British rule and Empire justice. With great delight one listened to the masterly survey and closely reasoned, lucid speech of the gifted and distinguished orator. One was at a loss whether to admire most the brilliant intellect that conceived the subject and arranged the arguments in the clearest manner or the beauty of diction and facility of expression. . . . To many Mr. Sastri's address will give a new orientation of the Indian problem that may help to an honourable solution in the interests of South Africa and the British Empire."<sup>12</sup>

At the end of his speech, one of his most stirring and elevating, a retired high-ranking military officer remarked that it was a humiliation that white men and women should have to listen to an Indian belonging to the coolie class. The rest of the audience was shocked and scandalised by the officer's insulting language. After answering some questions from the audience, Sastri gave a soft reply to the military officer without any impatience, excitement or resentment. When Sastri was about to step into his car a lady came up to him and requested him to return to the hall. There he found

<sup>11</sup> *Indian Opinion*, September 16, 1927, p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, August 19, 1927, p. 229.

the military officer in tears. The lady asked the officer to apologise to Sastri for his rudeness. As he was about to do so, Sastri assured him that he had already forgiven him and shook hands with him.

With telling effect, he recalled an earlier episode in London to drive home his plea in South Africa:

"I well remember some years ago being struck dumb when I went to a meeting in London at which people were glorifying the Empire. I felt cheered and buoyed up, but when they asked me to speak—I generally come at the end in these conferences [laughter]—I said this to them: 'Some of you [Cabinet Ministers among them] have spoken of the White Empire. I look at myself and my mind mis-gives me. Some of you have spoken of the English flag Empire. That is true. Some of you have spoken of an Anglo-Saxon Empire. Where do we come in in this discussion? I have heard speeches today, many speeches, but I have not heard so much as a mention of India and her three hundred million people.' There was a murmur of applause that grew to such a pitch that I was encouraged. And then, man after man came forward and said: 'Yes, that was a mistake. I should have included India, but somehow or other I forgot.' Ladies and gentlemen, that state of things is passing away, and I implore you to remember that you cannot allow that state of affairs to continue in South Africa."

In holding up British ideals, Sastri was holding up humanitarian ideals, ideals consecrated in the Covenants of the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations, and by all the historic religions and philosophies of the world.

Manilal Gandhi wrote to his father Mahatma Gandhi that Sastri's references to the British Empire were very embarrassing. In passing it on to Sastri, the Mahatma said of Manilal: "Knowing my later views about the Empire, I am not surprised at his mentality. He has not the faculty of discrimination to see that we are like blood-brothers even though we do not hold the same views about the Empire. I have not said to him much about this letter beyond warning him against coming to hasty judgments and telling him that you do honestly believe the Empire activity to be on the whole beneficial."<sup>13</sup> Sastri was not unfamiliar

<sup>13</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, pp. 80-81.

with Indian criticisms of his Empire sentiment. In a personal letter from Pretoria on October 6, 1927, he said: "I fully expected criticism of my sentiments about the Empire. People must make allowances for the difference in latitude and longitude. The public speaker whose conscience is not dead must be content very often to be guilty of *suppressio veri*. If he does not suggest a falsehood, he does as much as possible. However, it is a repetition of what occurred in my Dominion tour and when I returned after it. Some of the incidents I do not wish to recall."

While reference to the Empire paid dividends in Natal and Cape Province, they had not the same universal appeal in the Transvaal where the Boer element was predominant. To many Boers the British were still the "enemy" who defeated them in the Anglo-Boer War and established British imperial rule over them. Further, the Boers still held to their constitutional dogma that there shall be no equality between white and black in state or church. Appeals to Empire sentiment or pleas for the uplift of Indians evoked little response from them. In speaking to mixed audiences, Sastri had to appeal not only to the Empire sentiment, but also to other arguments. At a great meeting in Johannesburg in September, 1928, Sastri referred to the Empire sentiment and added: "To some of you that may not seem a cogent reason. So, I would appeal for great-hearted treatment and some recognition for the willingness with which we surrendered the right to free movement when you made the promise of fair, just and equitable treatment for those in the country."<sup>14</sup>

Sastri was also criticised by Indians in India and in South Africa for not having demanded political franchise for Indians in South Africa. He could not have done so, partly because he was the Agent of the Government of India and was bound by its instructions, partly because the South African whites would have denounced the Cape Town Agreement without reserve and compunction, and partly because Indians of the eminence of Gokhale and Gandhi had earlier surrendered the claim for good and sufficient reasons. It was true that Gandhi made a reservation in the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement of 1914 that other matters than those covered by it might be taken up when conditions permitted. Conditions grew steadily worse, for the Municipal franchise

<sup>14</sup> Sastri Speaks, p. 126.



was taken away in Natal in 1924, ten years after that Agreement! It would have been extremely unrealistic to ask for the franchise in 1927. It was, however, an ideal to be kept steadily in view. Even in his first policy speech in Durban, Sastri was careful to add that while he himself was not free to travel beyond the Cape Town Agreement, the whites should view with toleration and sympathy if the local Indians sought to regain the franchise. In his great speech in Pietermaritzburg, to an exclusively white and British audience, he recalled how the great authority on the British Empire, Prof. Dickey, had said that in the noble reign of Queen Victoria it was thought that Empire citizenship would establish equality between all her subjects, but that subsequent writers had denied it and had asserted that each Dominion was free to restrict immigration from other Dominions and discriminate between the subjects of the Empire. He admitted that such was the then legal position, but not the political and moral ideal which should inspire Empire statesmen. He wished that the future historian should be enabled to say: "It seemed as if British citizenship would be eclipsed and overwhelmed, but, thanks be to British statesmanship, it is emerging on the bright horizon, and will soon shine with the full blaze of day."<sup>15</sup> In his article on the Cape Town Agreement, published in the *Hindustan Review*, Patna, April, 1927, Sastri, while considering it unreasonable at the moment to re-open matters like free migration and equal franchise irrespective of race in the British Empire, said: "We all live in the hope that the day will arrive when, within the British Empire, the right of free migration and settlement and other rights of common citizenship will be acknowledged. But it is in the distant future."

Some important Indian leaders in South Africa doubted if the office of the Indian Agent was a help or hindrance to their cause. They feared that increasingly the Government of South Africa would ignore the local Indian leaders and deal directly and exclusively with the Indian Agent. Sastri took particular care that this should not happen; he upheld the status and prestige of the South African Indian Congress as the spokesman of the Indians.

Some Indian leaders who welcomed the appointment of the Indian Agent in South Africa were disappointed that

<sup>15</sup> *Indian Opinion*, August 19, 1927, Supplement, p. 4.

Sastri's approach was more judicial than partisan. They wished him to be an out-and-out advocate of the local Indians and take no independent line which took into account the other point of view also. By temperament and training, Sastri had the cross-bench mind. In India, he was often accused of appreciating his opponent's point of view more than his own! Such success as he achieved in South Africa was not a little due to his balanced approach.

In promoting the Indo-European Council in Durban Sastri faced embarrassing opposition from the leaders of the Natal Indian Congress who insisted that the Indian members of the Council should be their nominees and none other. They feared that the Congress might be dwarfed by the Council.<sup>16</sup> Sastri felt somewhat humiliated that, while he had cordial cooperation from the Europeans he invited, he met with a rebuff from the Indian leaders. The Council was, however, formed with other Indian leaders.

At a meeting of the Indo-European Council in Johannesburg, on October 20, 1929, some months after Sastri had left South Africa, its Indian members felt that they could not be too grateful to Sastri for the creation of the Council. It was not the success of any question that mattered, but the living fact that Europeans, who had hitherto no sympathetic interest in Indian affairs, were vying with one another to see that justice was done to them. Dr. Erasmus Ellis, speaking for the European members, paid a high tribute to Sastri for rousing burning interest among Europeans which they had not felt before for Indians.<sup>17</sup>

When Sastri made up his mind to terminate his appointment, he recommended Dr. R. P. Paranjpye or M. R. Jayakar as his successor. On November 1, 1928, he was informed that neither of them was available, and that Sir Kurma Venkata Reddy was appointed. It would appear that, failing Paranjpye and Jayakar, Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, consulted Lord Goschen, then Governor of Madras, who, in his turn, consulted the Raja of Panagal then Chief Minister of Madras and the leader of the Non-Brahmin Party, who suggested Reddi. Sastri was greatly disappointed, but he passed the word round that Reddi should be boomed and boosted. Mahatma Gandhi wrote to say that it was only after the appointment had been made that his

<sup>16</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, December 8, 1928.

<sup>17</sup> *Indian Opinion*, November 15, 1929.

blessing was invoked, and he had refused it, but sent a cable when Reddi took over to say: "Hope the new broom will sweep as well as the old."<sup>18</sup>

Sastri wore a turban abroad as in India, and fancied a hat only during his morning walks. The turban became his outward insignia, as it were; people recognised him by it. He sent an advance message to Reddi to wear a turban and sent him a couple of his own in case Reddi had none. Reddi landed in Durban with a turban, and maintained continuity as it were!

## *SABOTAGE IN KENYA*

**AFTER** achieving success in South Africa, Sastri faced failure in Kenya, due to the double dealing of the British Colonial Secretary, the Rt. Hon. L. S. H. Amery.

On his return to India from South Africa on February 16, 1929, Sastri was received like a conquering hero. He saw the Viceroy and the Government of India in Delhi. He called on Mahatma Gandhi in Ahmedabad and spoke under the chairmanship of the Mahatma. He visited several places at which he gave an account of his work in South Africa. He declined to resume the Presidentship of the Servants of India Society, but accepted the Vice-Chancellorship of the Annamalai University on an honorary basis. The University was founded by his great friend and admirer, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar of Chettinad, who wished Sastri to give a good start to the new institution. But he had to relinquish it almost immediately as he was persuaded by the Government of India to go to East Africa in connection with the visit of Sir Samuel Wilson, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, to discuss the implementation of the proposals for closer union of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika made by the Commission on Closer Union of the East African Territories, popularly known as the Hilton-Young Commission. The Commission recommended closer union for certain non-political purposes and rejected the demand of the white settlers for self-government responsible to themselves only. It, however, favoured the common franchise and the common electoral roll for all races, but as an ideal to be kept in view and reached with the consent of all the local parties concerned. The whites in Kenya were disappointed. Amery deputed

Sir Samuel to visit East Africa and ascertain on the spot the local reactions to the Commission's recommendations. In order to help the Indians in East Africa to prepare their case, the Government of India proposed to depute Sastri. But Amery wanted no such deputation. He was, however, finally prevailed upon to change his mind. He then insisted that the Indian delegate should not raise the question of the common roll, notwithstanding the Commission's approval of it in principle and its directive that local consent should be canvassed. When he was told of Amery's conditions, Sastri declined to go to East Africa. Ultimately, Amery was persuaded to change his mind again.<sup>1</sup>

On account of an unfortunate miscarriage in the travel arrangements, Sastri could not reach East Africa before Sir Samuel reached it. Pandit Hirday Nath Kunzru, of the Servants of India Society and a member of the Indian Legislative Assembly, who had arrived earlier to preside over the East African Indian Congress, helped to prepare the Indian case for presentation to Sir Samuel and led the Indian Deputation.

Sastri arrived in Mombasa on May 10, 1929. Though the East African Indian Congress had a few days earlier passed a resolution expressing "gratitude" to him for his "invaluable services to Indians in East Africa,"<sup>2</sup> he was received by the Indian leaders with sullen hostility and minimum courtesy. He was not *persona grata* with them, partly because he was a moderate in Indian politics and an opponent of Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation in India. When the Habibullah Delegation passed through Mombasa in 1926 *en route* to South Africa, Sir Mahommed and Sastri had privately advised the Indians in Kenya to call off their boycott of the legislative and municipal councils and submit to the separate electoral roll under protest and hope for the common roll later. This advice was unpalatable to the Kenya Indian leaders, though they realised the disadvantages of the boycott. On his way to India from South Africa in February, 1929, Sastri made a speech in Mombasa, in which he summarised his work in South Africa and mentioned that the appointment of the Agent of the Government of India in South Africa had yielded good results and might do the same in Kenya. He approved of the proposal

<sup>1</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, May 12, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, May 2, 1929, p. 213.

to appoint a member of the Indian Civil Service to the Executive Council of Kenya during the period that the Hilton-Young Commission's Report was under consideration.<sup>3</sup> He also noted that Indians in Kenya were better off than their compeers in India. These remarks were resented by the Kenya Indian leaders who feared that the Kenya whites would exploit them against the Indians. The *East African Standard*, the chief organ of the Kenya whites, published a report from its Bombay correspondent that Sastri had made some remarks disparaging to Indians in Kenya. Rumours were spread that he was a "King's Man" and was therefore favoured by Sir Edward Grigg, the Governor of Kenya, who championed the Kenya whites. It was also rumoured that he had surrendered the political rights of Indians in South Africa and would do the same in Kenya. A mass meeting of Indians in Nairobi on April 7, 1929, had condemned him.

The Kenya Indian leaders had rejected the Kenya White Paper of 1923 which offered them communal and lesser representation than the whites and had boycotted the Kenya Legislative Council and the Municipal Councils of Nairobi and Mombasa. There was, however, a small section which did not approve of the boycott. The European community also was divided about the common roll; some, particularly in Mombasa, were in favour, while others, particularly in Nairobi, were against. Hope was expressed that Sastri might be able to secure agreement on the common roll, subject to some conditions. Amery had said in the British House of Commons, about May 1, 1929, that the common roll was not beyond practical politics but agreement between the three races, the whites, the Indians and the Africans, was essential. The Labour Party representatives had said that, when they came to power, they would introduce the common roll on a civilisation franchise, irrespective of race. At a lunch party at Government House, Nairobi, on May 4, 1929, Sir Samuel, however, regretted that the Hilton-Young Commission had re-opened the question of the common roll so soon after the Government's decision against it in 1923, and then left it undecided. He was not, therefore, going to discuss the common roll.<sup>4</sup> As he had to leave Kenya for Uganda before the arrival of Sastri,

<sup>3</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, February 17, 1929.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, May 4, 1929.

he left a memorandum for Sastri. In it he made no reference to the franchise.

At a lunch in his honour soon after his arrival in Mombasa, Sastri denied having disparaged Indians in Kenya. To compare two people was always a most invidious and dangerous task, and he was the last person to embark on any such foolish enterprise.

What he remembered having said in Bombay was that the Indian leaders in Kenya were apprehensive that the Agent of the Government of India, if appointed, might prevent the access that they then enjoyed to the Kenya Government and would become the accepted spokesman of the Indian community instead of themselves, and he had assured that the apprehension was ill-founded because his own experience in South Africa was that it was no part of the Agent's business to displace the community for whom he stood or to prevent their natural leaders from finding their own channels of expression. The Kenya Indians felt that their status was not as low as that of the Indians in South Africa; they had the franchise, and adult franchise at that, like the whites, while Indians in South Africa had none. They had the constitutional right to elect their representatives to the Kenya Legislative Council. They did not, therefore, need the services of an Agent of the Government of India to look after them as the Indians in South Africa did. They, however, wanted the Government of India to give them the assistance of their representative as and when they asked for it. It may be noted here that since India attained independence there has been a Commissioner of the Government of India in East Africa without the local Indians apprehending a lowering of their status or blocking of their access to their Government.

After clearing the misunderstanding, Sastri referred to his task in Kenya. He was in favour of the common roll, but would have it with the consent of the whites and would do his best to secure it, if possible. The common franchise had been the declared aim of the Kenya Indians. As long ago as 1923, when he had the good fortune to be in London working with the authorities there, the common roll was the great question upon which he and they laid emphasis. The Government of India also supported the contention of the Kenya Indians that not only their interests, but, in the long run, the interests of Kenya itself would be best served by

the establishment of the common roll. Neither he nor the Government of India was likely to weaken on that decision at the moment when that view had received the support of an authoritative Commission. The Commission had, however, said that it would be impossible to establish the common roll without the free and voluntary consent of the European community. That, he thought, was also common ground. It would be idle for the Indian community to expect that such an important matter would be decided in their favour unless that decision was also based upon the consent of the European community. The problem then was to get their consent. It would be secured only by arguing calmly with them and convincing them that what they now regarded as damaging to their interests was not likely to have that result in the long run, but the opposite. To reassure them that they would be safe to consent to a common roll should be their business and pleasure. He, therefore, pleaded for moderation: "Now, I do not see, my friends, speaking to you with the utmost confidence, I do not see how we can hope to get results at all in this task unless in stating our case we are fair to the other side, we are reasonable and we are moderate." Striking a personal note, he said: "Moderation has been brought up against me as one of my chief deficiencies. I have been attacked in a Kenya paper as a moderate in Indian politics. I am not going to plead guilty; I am going shamelessly to avow my moderation. I believe in moderation, and I hold, therefore, that these extreme people upon either side, who shout their notions and have no time to listen to the other side, get the hearing they do only because the moderate man does not speak out loudly or often enough. Now I am told that in Mombasa there are a good many people who, if moderation were a crime, would have to stand in the dock with me. To these fellow criminals of mine I would make an appeal. Don't, for goodness' sake, hide your heads in shame. Come out and own up fully that you are moderates and are not ashamed of being moderates, for while public questions have reached a point of difficulty, believe me, that just then it is for the moderates to cope with them. . . . Only by moderation, by reason, and fairness in the heart will public questions be settled to the satisfaction of the community." He then pleaded for compromise. "If we learn to solve these difficulties in the right spirit and are content to get what



he left a memorandum for Sastri. In it he made no reference to the franchise.

At a lunch in his honour soon after his arrival in Mombasa, Sastri denied having disparaged Indians in Kenya. To compare two people was always a most invidious and dangerous task, and he was the last person to embark on any such foolish enterprise.

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we can and to wait for the rest until the day after tomorrow, if the Kenya question is to be solved in that way, then it seems to me it is a symptom not to be neglected.”<sup>5</sup>

Sastri met Sir Samuel in Uganda and was informed that Sir Samuel had definite instructions from Amery not to raise the franchise question and to say so in Kenya! Sastri was surprised and shocked and feared that Sir Samuel might have already passed on the news to the whites in Kenya and had queered the pitch, as it were, for him. He requested Sir Samuel not to give further publicity to it and render his task impossible.

Sastri advised the Uganda Indians not to ask for elective representation in the Uganda Legislative Council without the consent of the whites, lest the situation in Kenya should be reproduced in Uganda also. They might, however, ask for equality of representation with the whites on a nominated basis, notwithstanding that they outnumbered the whites.

Leaving Kunzru to accompany Sir Samuel to Tanganyika, Sastri returned to Nairobi to seek agreement on the common roll. Sir Jacob Barth, the Chief Justice and Acting Governor of Kenya, and Lady Barth invited Sastri to be their guest at Government House for some time. Thereafter, Sastri took a house where he could meet and entertain Indians and whites and establish personal contacts, as in South Africa. He held several discussions with Indian leaders, some of them stormy and unpleasant. He called on some of his most virulent Indian critics at their homes and made some converts.

In his discussions with Indians, Sastri explored the possibilities of a compromise which would be acceptable to both the Indians and the whites. The alternatives were: the common electoral roll, with differential franchise qualifications; the communal roll with equal representation; and the nomination by Government of Indians informally elected by the Indian political bodies. At one stage, Sastri enquired if the Indians in Kenya would volunteer an assurance that the dominance of the whites in Kenya would not be questioned, if only because they had implied it when they agreed, though somewhat reluctantly, to the Wood-Winterton Agreement which gave more representation to the whites than to the Indians, though on a common roll.

<sup>5</sup> *Servant of India*, May 30, 1929, p. 263.

Some of the leaders admitted the fact of white supremacy, but hesitated to avow it publicly in so many terms. In these private explorations, Sastri indicated that he was opposed to the boycott of the councils, legislative and municipal, and advocated cooperation even on the communal roll, if the common roll was not possible with the consent of the whites. He called on some of the determined white opponents of the common roll and entertained them at his residence and established contacts. Some of them were willing to consider the common roll, if the whites were given an elected majority in the Legislature.

He made several speeches in Nairobi. One of them was meant for the whites only, but a few Indians were admitted. At another public meeting at the Royal Theatre, while Sastri was half-way through his speech which was listened to with rapt attention by the large audience, he was interrupted by the police on the pretext that the audience exceeded the licensed capacity of the theatre and insisted on some of them being turned out! It was a discourtesy within the law. Sastri resumed his speech as if nothing had happened. About the same time, Mr. Tufty, who was assigned to Sastri by the Government of India as his confidential Secretary, was expelled from the Norfolk Hotel without any reason being assigned! It was presumed that he was suspected to be an Anglo-Indian and not a pure white! The Indians proposed to entertain Sir Samuel and Lady Wilson to dinner at the local European Hotel, but the Hotel refused. When Sir Samuel invited Sastri to dinner at the Hotel, he was gently asked to make sure that the Hotel would permit him. Finally, the Hotel acquiesced. These incidents left a bad taste in the mouth. But there were compensations. Several Europeans and Indians were most friendly and solicitous.

On Sir Samuel's return to Nairobi after his tour of Uganda and Tanganyika, Sastri brought to his notice the neglect of Indian education and health services and feared that if the whites were given more power, the fate of Indians would be worse. Sir Samuel confessed that he too was of that opinion, but that Amery had overruled him. He informed Sastri that he had already intimated the Europeans that the British Government had decided not to open the question of the franchise and it was only fair that he should let the Indians also know of it. He also revealed that

Sir Masterton Smith of the India Office, London, advised him to make the most of the fact that the Hilton-Young Commission did not definitely recommend the common roll.<sup>6</sup> The Deputation of the East African Indian Congress formally met Sir Samuel on May 31, 1929, and learnt from him that he was not prepared to discuss the common roll!

Sastri called on Lord Delamere, the leader of the European settlers and the most determined opponent of the common roll and advocate of white supremacy in Kenya. He told Sastri that the issue would not be settled in Kenya but only in London. In the meanwhile, the Indians discussed the next step. They decided that they should send a deputation to England.

Sastri cabled the Government of India to insist that their views should be heard if, as suggested by Mr. Jan. F. Hofmeyr of South Africa, a conference of the three East African Administrations should be held to discuss the Hilton-Young Commission's recommendations.

About this time, Sastri received messages from the Viceroy in India suggesting that he should lead the Indian Delegation to the League of Nations, Geneva. But later, Sir Mahommed Habibullah agreed to lead, and wished that Sastri should accompany him, primarily to discuss the Kenya problem with the British Cabinet. However, about June 1, 1929, Habibullah cabled Sastri to return to India forthwith and be prepared to proceed at once to London for talks with the British Cabinet regarding Kenya.

Sastri left Nairobi on June 9 for Mombasa and learnt that the local Indians were up in arms against him because he had in his first speech on arrival from India on May 10, 1929, expressed the view that the common roll was impracticable without the consent of the whites. They held that, if the communal roll could be forced on Indians without their consent and against their strenuous protest, there was no justification for not forcing the common roll on the whites. They also objected to Sastri's remark that Indians in Kenya were better off than their compeers in India, which, they feared, would be used against them by the local whites. They went so far as to offer a farewell party to Kunzru and cut out Sastri! Kunzru, of course, declined the honour if Sastri was not included. Sir Samuel somewhat playfully remarked that he seemed to have given the im-

<sup>6</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, June 4, 1929.

pression that he was hiding behind the back of Sastri with regard to Indians and asked to meet some of them. Sastri arranged a meeting. The Indian leaders argued their case so vigorously and even fiercely that Sir Samuel promised to leave the question of the common roll open. He was just being diplomatic but the Indian leaders were pleased.

Sastri made his farewell speech on June 11, 1929, in Mombasa under the chairmanship of Mr. P. H. Clarke, a European businessman, who in a strong speech supported the common roll and asked the Indians to take the matter to London. Sastri was unwell and nearly collapsed after his lecture, causing great anxiety. In the course of his speech, he said that he had no success to report in the matter of bringing about a better understanding between the Europeans and the Indians regarding the common roll. Somewhat sadly he said: "I have found the task by no means easy. It is not my object to apportion blame. Perhaps another could have done better. . . . If a man with far greater prudence and ability to understand the various aspects of the question stayed here for several months, he might be able to make some impression." He declared himself altogether on the side of the common roll, for he knew the unfortunate consequence of the communal roll in India. Yet, in order to reassure the Europeans, the Indians had offered safeguards. They might be induced to give up adult franchise and accept a "civilisation" franchise, like the one advocated by Cecil Rhodes of South Africa, if the Europeans also would do likewise. They were also willing to accept a smaller representation in the legislature than the Europeans so that the political balance in the country might not be upset. These sacrifices established the good faith of the Indian community. They did not wish to dominate the country but they did not wish that the Europeans should do so either; they were opposed to two classes of citizenship, a superior white and an inferior Indian. He recognised that Indians in Kenya were better off than their compatriots in India but that was no argument against them. For, the sole purpose and justification for migration was to improve one's lot. He finally appealed to the Europeans to do the right and noble thing. "Stretch out your hand in amity and fellowship, smile and say the first words of peace and friendship, and you will find that my fellow-countrymen, however in their hearts they may be sad at the contempla-

tion of grievances and disabilities, will not be slow to take several steps in advance and come forward to meet you on this platform of friendship, of cooperation, of common and earnest endeavour in making Kenya a prosperous and contented member of the British Commonwealth." Turning to the Indians, he said: "You are by no means to wait until you are summoned to this temple of amity and friendship. ... Remember no wrongs; put them aside in view of the great future which alone can brighten the prospects of Kenya. ... Come forward then; you have friends among Europeans."<sup>7</sup>

The moment that Sir Samuel revealed that he had instructions not to discuss the common roll, Sastri realised that his mission was a failure. If the matter had been left open, he might have achieved some compromise by consent. He saw some hope in the assumption of office just then of the Labour Party in England. It raised the hopes of Indians, while it roused apprehensions among the Europeans. It was clear that the issue must be settled in London and not in Kenya.

It would seem that Amery was more diplomatic than frank with Sastri and the Government of India. It was only after the Government had, at the insistence of Sastri, obtained the assurance of Amery that it was open to him to discuss the question of the common roll as recommended by the Hilton-Young Commission and to seek consent for it in Kenya that Sastri agreed to go there. Only to find that Amery had gone back on it and told the whites about it even before Sastri could reach them! Whatever prospect there was of agreement was thus sabotaged by Amery. The *Servant of India* characterised his conduct as a "scandal, the like of which has not been witnessed for a long time past." The *Hindu* of Madras appropriately said:

The way in which the [Sastri] mission was sent and the status assigned to the mission were humiliating, not to the Indian Government only, but to India as a whole. The Government sent one of the most distinguished of Indian publicists as their agent only to find that he was to go as suitor and plead their cause before a subordinate officer of the Colonial Office. That Mr. Sastri found it his duty to discharge such a task may be accounted to his sympathy with the cause to which he possibly

<sup>7</sup> *Servant of India*, July 4, 1929, p. 307.

subordinated considerations of prestige and status. The Government of India, however, ought not to have placed him in that oppressing situation. The country has the right to demand why the Government were guilty of so colossal a blunder as that involved in sending the Sastri mission and we hope that they will lose no time in placing the full facts before the public regarding this unfortunate affair.”<sup>8</sup>

The Viceroy informed Sastri subsequently that, on receipt of the news from Sastri from East Africa, he had protested to Amery that he had played false with the Government of India and that he would press that the question of the common roll should be kept open, and would advise the Indians in Kenya to enter the councils by nomination in the meanwhile.

Kenya broke down Sastri's health for the second time. He was very ill when he made his farewell speech in Mombasa. On his arrival in Bombay, he had to consult heart specialists and was ordered complete rest for some months in Bangalore. It was impossible for him to proceed to England on the business of Kenya.

Sastri submitted his report to the Government of India on his Kenya mission from Bangalore in September, 1929. He was persuaded to modify his report somewhat at the instance of Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Wedgewood Benn, Secretary of State for India, in the Labour Government in England.<sup>9</sup> The Report was published in March, 1930. In it Sastri said, among other things, that Indians had set their heart on the common roll, if not the common franchise, in the interests of themselves and Kenya as a whole; that they had boycotted the seats offered to them in the legislative and municipal councils on a separate roll; that they realised the moral and material disadvantages of such non-cooperation; that they regarded their sacrifices as the measure of their insistence on the common roll; and that Sastri could not persuade them to abandon their non-cooperation, particularly as the Hilton-Young Commission had favoured the common roll, if it could be had by consent; and that there was some chance of securing the consent of the whites if Sir Samuel Wilson had not foreclosed it under instructions from Amery. He

<sup>8</sup> *Servant of India*, August 1, 1929, p. 350.

<sup>9</sup> P. Kodanda Rao's Diary, November 19, 1929.



added that the Kenya Indians would oppose any increase in the political power of the whites and would prefer that the Colonial Office in London should have undiminished authority in Kenya, particularly in the matter of African interests, and that the new Labour Government should use its power and influence to promote agreement on the common roll in Kenya.

His recommendation that the consent of the Kenya whites should be secured was criticised in some quarters as giving a veto to them, while the communal roll was imposed on Indians without their consent and against their will. Sastri was, however, confident that if the British Government made a "clear and firm enunciation from the headquarters of the Commonwealth of a principle and a policy consonant with its real character, the next few years might witness in Kenya the beginnings of a common citizenship, full of promise for the future." In his opinion, the obstacle was not the whites in Kenya but the British Cabinet.<sup>10</sup> His hope was realised in 1960, after much travail and racial ill-will.

Sastri's attitude towards the common roll in Kenya was more outright and uncompromising in 1923 than in 1929. He felt compelled to lower the stand a bit and countenance a compromise which gave Indians less than equality. His experience in 1923, when both the British and Indian Governments failed to rise to his expectations in defence of racial equality even in a limited sphere, discouraged him. Gokhale and Gandhi had been obliged to acknowledge the political dominance of the whites in South Africa, a Dominion; the British Cabinet had applied it to Kenya, a Colony. The Government of India and the people of India had no effective sanctions. Even the Indian members of the Government of India were not sufficiently shocked as to exert maximum constitutional pressure by resigning office. Even the Wood-Winterton agreement, which Indians were persuaded to accept as the best solution that could be had in 1923, postulated white superiority. He was reconciled to the significance of his agonised cry of 1923: "Kenya lost, all is lost and all along the line." Smuts stood for the Boer ideology of white superiority; Sastri stood for the British ideology of race equality. Smuts had triumphed over Sastri not only in South Africa but also in Kenya, thanks to the

<sup>10</sup> *Servant of India*, March 13, 1930, p. 128.

Tory British Government. Hope lay in the British Labour Government.

In 1930, a Joint Select Committee of both Houses of the British Parliament examined the British Government's proposals regarding East Africa. Sastri was deputed by the Government of India to give evidence before the Committee in May 1931. He took a firmer line about the common roll; he no longer insisted on the consent of the whites for it. He confirmed that African interests should be paramount and that the immigrant communities should have no authority over them. If, however, they were asked to share responsibility, Indians should share it equally with the whites.<sup>11</sup> He also put in the plea that the status of Indians overseas had not yet been settled to the satisfaction of Indians who resented being assigned a place inferior to the whites.

The Joint Select Committee's Report which was published in November, 1931, affirmed the paramountcy of African interests, but rejected the common roll and equality of representation between whites and Indians. Sastri was greatly disappointed.

<sup>11</sup> *Servant of India*, December 3, 1931, p. 583.

## *FIRST ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE*

THE sixty-first birthday of Sastri fell on September 22, 1929. Its principal celebration was in Bangalore, where his relations and friends foregathered for the occasion. It was marked by an innovation among Indians in Bangalore at the time. Sastri planned to invite his friends to a dinner party. As he was temporarily camping in Bangalore, he was advised to have it in the Modern Hindu Hotel rather than in his house which was too small and inadequately equipped for the purpose. Though used to such functions in Britain, he hesitated to make the innovation in Bangalore for fear of the criticism of orthodoxy. Mrs. Sastri would not agree to such a departure from tradition. Ultimately, a compromise was reached. Mrs. Sastri had the dinner for the ladies at the house and Sastri had it for men in the Hotel. The innovation has since become tradition!

In response to kindly enquiries from grateful Indian friends in South Africa, Sastri happened to mention that Bangalore suited him best for permanent residence and it was his dream to own a house there and equip it to suit his tastes, rather than shift from one rented house to another, as he had to do. After his departure from South Africa, his friends there sent him a donation to buy a house in Bangalore. But he decided to fund the amount with the Servants of India Society for giving scholarships to South African Indian students studying in India. When the idea did not fructify, he made over the money to the Society. On the occasion of his birthday, his great friend and admirer, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar, gave a surprise gift of Rupees Ten Thousand towards the purchase of a house in Bangalore. But Sastri changed his mind and bought a house in Madras,

which, though worth more, was cheerfully sold to him for that amount by Messrs. K. Balasubramanian and K. Chandrasekharan, both great admirers of him. An important consideration in preferring the house in Madras was its proximity to the house of his great friend, T. R. Venkatarama Sastri, whose concern for and devotion to him cannot be exaggerated. Sastri named his house "Svagatam" and spent his last years in it.

Soon after his birthday in September, 1929, Sastri himself presided over Mahatma Gandhi's birthday meeting on October 2, 1929, in Madras, and described him as "one of those rare souls who are born from time to time — all too rarely it may be — to redeem mankind from their sins and failings." He acknowledged his personal obligations to the Mahatma over the South African episode. "To me Mahatma Gandhi has been not merely an incomparable friend . . . but an ally in an extremely difficult task, one whom I held up before myself in my South African work as an unfailing guide in all matters, large and small. Of all my personal satisfactions none, believe me, ladies and gentlemen, is so great as this fact that for a time at least, divided as we are otherwise, it was vouchsafed to me, under Providence, to work in a way which he could heartily approve."

Sastri was appointed a member of the Royal Commission on Indian Labour along with N. M. Joshi, his colleague in the Servants of India Society and leader of the Labour movement in India, and joined it in Bombay on October 11, 1929. Though he was not himself associated with the Labour movement, the Rt. Hon. J. H. Whitley, who, as Speaker of the House of Commons, knew Sastri well and who was the Chairman of the Royal Commission, desired him to be included in the Commission. Owing to his ill health, Sastri was not able to do the extensive touring which the Commission did, but contented himself with visiting a few places like Karachi, Lahore, Delhi, Madras and Coorg. During the Commission's visit to Madras, he presided over it, in the temporary absence of Whitley.

As stated earlier, Sastri came to know confidentially before he left for South Africa in June 1927 that a Royal Commission was likely to be appointed to review the working of the Montagu Reforms and make recommendations. It was one of the strong reasons for his reluctance to go to

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, October 10, 1929, p. 478.

South Africa, for he wished to be in India when the Commission visited it. He was even assured that he would be free to return to India in that case. But that was not to be. The appointment of the Royal Commission, under the Chairmanship of Sir John (later Lord) Simon, was publicly announced on November 26, 1927. Sastri had been in South Africa only a few months and could not leave his difficult mission there and return to India. But his disappointment was keen.

The Simon Commission was appointed by Lord Birkenhead, the Conservative Secretary of State for India, partly because of the General Election which was due in England in 1929 with a probable Labour victory and partly to show his contempt for Indian politicians. For the Commission consisted only of Britishers who were to examine the competence of Indians for political reforms! The all-white commission, as it was popularly called, was boycotted by all the leading political parties in India, including the Liberals.

The General Election in Britain in 1929 put in office the Labour Party which was more sympathetic towards India's political progress. This event, combined with the effective boycott, induced a change in the work of the Simon Commission. The change was also stimulated by the demand of the Indian States Subjects' Conference to be heard by the Commission. The Commission found a way out of its most embarrassing and humiliating position by advocating the convocation of a Round Table Conference in London of representatives of British India as well as of Indian States to discuss with British representatives the political future of India.

Another cause of conflict was that the Government of India during the Viceroyalty of Lord Reading had interpreted the phrase "Responsible Government," offered in the Montagu Declaration of 1917, as inferior to "Dominion Status"! It was bitterly resented by all political parties in India. Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, persuaded the Labour Government in England to declare that "Dominion Status" was implicit in "Responsible Government"! The declaration along with the intention to call a Round Table Conference, was made on October 31, 1929.

As has been stated already, ill health prevented Sastri from active participation in the work of the Royal Commission on Indian Labour or in public life generally. He,

however, attended the session of the National Liberal Federation of India in Madras during Christmas, 1929. The main issue before political India at the time was the attitude towards the Round Table Conference, as the issue of Dominion Status vs. Responsible Government was resolved by the Government's declaration that the former was implicit in the latter. The Congress, at its Calcutta session in 1928, had given notice to the British Government that if Dominion Status was not granted to India by December 31, 1929, it would declare for Independence on the supposition that it was superior to Dominion Status. Government not having conferred Dominion Status by that date but only offered a Round Table Conference, the Congress, under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of the session, decided to reject the Conference and proclaim independence. The Liberal Federation in Madras took a different view. It took note of the assurance of the new Labour Secretary of State for India, Mr. Wedgewood Benn, that the Conference would be free to discuss any proposals that might be placed before it by any of its members and would not be fettered by any proposals sponsored by the British Government. It was free to discuss the immediate grant of Dominion Status which amounted to self-determination for India. The Indian Liberals, therefore, welcomed the Round Table Conference. Sastri appealed to all parties to combine to secure Dominion Status, subject to such reservations and safeguards as might be found necessary during the transitional period. He suggested that the progressive and national elements in the country, including the Congress, should have preponderant representation in the Conference. As against Independence outside the Commonwealth, the Liberal Federation preferred Dominion Status within it for the reason that India would, as a member of the Commonwealth, be saved heavy defence expenditure. She would not be less independent but more secure.

Both the Congress and the Liberal Federation made reference to the Indian States. The Congress expressed the opinion that the Ruling Princes of India should give Responsible Government to their peoples, while the Liberal Federation hoped that the Princes would themselves bring up the level of administration in their States to that prevailing in British India. It also noted with gratification the

support of the leading Princes to the Round Table Conference and recognised that the internal autonomy of the "Indian States" should be guaranteed in any constitution of India based on Dominion Status. Neither body made a reference to the representation of the subjects of the Indian Princes at the Round Table Conference. The Muslim League made no reference to the Indian States, Princes or peoples, nor did the Hindu Maha Sabha. Both the Government of India and the Princes were at one in excluding the subjects of the latter from the Round Table Conference.

Along with the Royal Commission of Indian Labour, Sastri left India in April, 1930, for London, and attended the first session of the Round Table Conference between Britain and India from November, 1930, to January, 1931. During his stay in England and before the Round Table Conference began, Sastri divided his time between the Labour Commission and creating public opinion in England favourable to India. The latter was not an easy task for, the Congress, having rejected the invitation to the Round Table Conference and having proclaimed Independence or *Purna Swaraj* and celebrated the first "Independence Day" on January 26, 1930, embarked on Civil Disobedience, which took the form of "salt satyagraha," inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi. The manufacture of salt was a Government monopoly. The salt-tax had been condemned by Indian as well as some British statesmen as an avoidable burden on the poor Indian tax-payer and as a tax which should be resorted to only in the last instance and in desperate financial circumstances. The Mahatma demanded the abolition of the salt-tax as a sign of "change of heart" on the part of the Government. As the Government did not respond, the Mahatma embarked on his famous "march to the sea" at Dandi to make salt illegally and court arrest. He was arrested on April 5, 1930. Civil Disobedience was widespread. Government promulgated several repressive Ordinances to meet the situation. Government and the Congress were moving towards a tragic show-down.

In the meanwhile mediators were active. A message, signed by over one hundred American clergymen of standing, was sent to the British Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, urging him to seek an amicable settlement with the Mahatma and the Indian people. The Liberal

Federation urged the immediate announcement of the Round Table Conference, its terms of reference and its composition so as to induce even the non-cooperators to cooperate. The Viceroy had long interviews with leading statesmen like the Rt. Hon. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and the Rt. Hon. M. R. Jayakar. The British Government had scruples about negotiating with Indian leaders pending the publication of the Report of the Simon Commission. When it was published in May, 1930, it was universally acknowledged to be out of date and was in consequence rather unceremoniously discarded. The Round Table Conference held the centre of the stage.

In England, Sastri was busy promoting conciliation between the British Government and the Indian Congress, one of the requisites of which was the release of political prisoners and, particularly, Mahatma Gandhi.

In reply to a British suggestion, "Leave India to her Fate," Sastri indignantly rejoined: "Perish the thought." Writing in the British weekly, *Spectator*, of June 14, 1930, he protested that Britain could not withdraw from India with honour before she enabled her to defend herself. In spite of urgent and repeated entreaties, Britain neglected the Indianisation of the "Indian" Army, though India paid for it. "It would be a gross betrayal, nothing short of infamy, if Britain were to leave India without liquidating this supreme obligation." A period of transition was necessary. It posed a dilemma. It was easier to persuade the British personnel to take orders from Indians in the civil side of the Government of India than in the military side. Should the transfer of the civil side be delayed till the Indianisation of the Army was completed, or should Indians be permitted to control British personnel in the Army during the process of its Indianisation? Sastri pointed out that some of the Dominion Governments were allowed to control British forces during such transition and urged that a similar expedient might be followed in India also, given goodwill.

Sastri's suggestion was adopted ultimately when India became a Dominion in 1947 and later an Independent Republic within the Commonwealth. The British personnel in the Indian Army continued to serve under the Indian personnel of the new Government of India during the transition to complete Indianisation of the Indian Army. In



this connection, it is interesting to recall the military intervention of India in Kashmir late in 1947. When it was invaded by tribals through Pakistan and Srinagar, its capital, was in imminent danger of being captured by them, its Maharaja appealed to the new Dominion Government of India to come to his rescue. The Commander-in-Chief and most of the General Staff of the Indian Defence Forces were Britishers. They were of the view that it was then too late to rescue Srinagar even by the despatch of the Indian Air Force. Lord Mountbatten, who was Supremo in the South-East Asia Theatre during the Second World War and was at the time Governor-General of India, shared the view of the British Commander-in-Chief. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Nehru and his Cabinet of Indians overrode the British advice and ordered the British Commander-in-Chief to fly the Indian Air Force to Kashmir and save Srinagar. From the military point of view, the civilian Government of India displayed a courage, which bordered on foolhardiness, when it took action against expert military advice. The Indian Air Force worked a miracle and saved Srinagar in the nick of time. Lord Mountbatten paid a handsome tribute to the Force. The event is significant for another reason. British Generals took orders from Indian civilians.

During his prolonged stay in England with the Labour Commission, Sastri laboured incessantly, in spite of his ill health, to educate British public opinion regarding the political situation in India and to plead that the remedy for Indian unrest was reform and not repression. In an article published in the *Labour Monthly* of June, 1930, he emphasised the vital importance of describing the new reforms as Dominion Status, *subject* to some reservations, rather than as a *step* towards it. It was also of vital importance that Mahatma Gandhi and the other political prisoners should be released and enabled to participate in the negotiations. He noted that even the most ardent among the British advocates of immediate Dominion Status for India entertained a lurking fear that it might lead to civil war and chaos because of communal divisions and the apprehensions of Indian minorities. He pleaded that it was up to the Indian majorities to inspire confidence among the minorities even by some departure from orthodox democratic canons rather than that the British should be their protectors.

The Simon Commission's Report was, on the whole, so reactionary that nationalist India denounced it, while the Indian Princes, the Muslims and other minorities accepted such parts of it as were favourable to them. In his contribution to the *Manchester Guardian* of June 26, 1930, the *Asiatic Review* and the *Political Quarterly* and in his speech at a meeting of Members of Parliament of all Parties in the House of Commons on July 1, 1930, and at the Friends House, London, at the Liberal Summer School at Oxford and in the paper which he read before the East India Association on July 22, 1930, Sastri subjected the Report to searching criticism. His strongest objection was that it implicitly repudiated Dominion Status as the objective of India's constitutional progress, notwithstanding that seven months earlier the British Labour Government had publicly proclaimed it. Before making the declaration, the British Government sought the consent of the Simon Commission but failed to secure it because the Commission was deliberately opposed to Dominion Status for India and at any time, as its subsequent recommendations proved. Sastri pointed out that Dominion Status implied the right of secession from the British Commonwealth which had authoritatively been described as a voluntary association of its Dominions, but he was opposed to the exercise of that right. The Simon Commission was opposed to granting that right to India lest she should use it and therefore avoided the use of the phrase "Dominion Status." It took the view that the defence of India was not the concern of India alone but of the whole Commonwealth and that, therefore, the Indian Army should be under the permanent control of the British Government and include effective British personnel, particularly in its officer ranks. In order to ensure this purpose, the Government of India should continue to be responsible to the British Government and not to the Indian Legislature. The Commission was willing that a separate Indian Army might be constituted for maintaining internal peace and be under the control of Indian ministers.

It accepted the view of the Indian Princes that they had direct relations with the British Crown through its Viceroy in India and with the Government of India only as long as it was the instrument of the Crown. But if the Government of India should be responsible to the Indian legislature representing the people of British India, they

could have no relations with it and, therefore, India could never be a Dominion on a par with the other Dominions. In accepting this view, the Commission went beyond the demands of the Indian Princes themselves who might be willing to negotiate their relations with the Dominion Government of British India. It created a permanent barrier between Princely India and British India.

Sastri was also opposed to the recommendation of the Commission that the unitary Government of India should be converted into a federation, of which the constituent units were to be the British Indian Provinces and the Princely States. While the British Indian Provinces were to be members of the Federation compulsorily, the Indian States were to join at the will of the Princes, while their subjects had no say in the matter. Further, the Federation was to have a few delegated powers, while the bulk of powers and functions would be with the units. The strengthening of the units as against the federation was intended to meet also the communal claims of the Muslims and create Muslim Provinces. The only major proposal which Sastri approved was the abolition of Diarchy in the British Indian Provinces and the establishment of unitary Responsible Governments therein, subject to the overriding powers of the Governors for specific purposes. Taking the Report as a whole, Sastri found it unacceptable. He summed up his reaction thus:

"By refusing the greater part of the demands of educated Indians, the Report had added to the causes of contention. To flout the intelligentsia, while satisfying the Princes, the British, the minority communities and the Services is to involve Britain and India in strife, of which no one can see the end."<sup>2</sup>

The apprehension that the Simon Report would form the basis of negotiations at the Round Table Conference was dissipated when the British Government ignored it and even refused to include Sir John Simon in the Conference!

Sastri's political service in England was highly appreciated. His personality, his eloquence, his sweet reasonableness and mastery of the subject attracted wide attention and created a deep impression in England. Of his speech at the Manchester Luncheon Club on September 16, 1930,

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, August 7, 1930, p. 379.

the influential weekly, the *Spectator*, said: "No event in the past few days in connection with India, however, has been comparable in importance, we think, with the speech delivered in Manchester on Tuesday by Mr. Srinivasa Sastri. It made it clearer than ever that there is not a great deal of difference in substance between the demands of the Congress and those of the Liberals or Moderates. There is, however, one difference which is of immense range and significance. Mr. Sastri's speech was eminently reasonable in spirit and courteous in tone." It admitted that "it would be impossible to govern India permanently against the will of Moderate India as well as of Extremist India." The *Manchester Guardian* said that his speech gave to most people of Britain an entirely new conception of India and Indians. "Like the Congress Party, it [the Indian Liberal Party] stands essentially for Indian independence. Those people who imagine that Indians like Mr. Sastri, who are wise and cool enough to see the worthwhileness of cooperating with the British Government, will tamely accept anything that is offered to them are greatly mistaken. There is no single Indian alive of any consequence who will do this." It urged: "We must dare to give way to a demand for independence based on the very principles which we ourselves prize most highly and which India has learnt from us. . . . Indians are no longer a subject people; they demand real power and must be given it."<sup>3</sup> Sastri was primarily responsible for the conversion of so influential a journal as the *Manchester Guardian* to the full support of Dominion Status for India.

With the repudiation of the Simon Report by the British Government itself, attention was focused on the Round Table Conference, its functions and its personnel. While Sastri was preparing the ground in England, Sapru and Jayakar were persuading the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi to participate in the Conference. With the consent of the sympathetic Viceroy, Lord Irwin, they interviewed the Congress leaders in their jails. Hopes of securing their cooperation rose and fell. While the Viceroy went far to meet the wishes of the Congress leaders, the latter raised their demands and practically sought to dictate terms to the Government as a victor to the vanquished! While the Government agreed that the Conference was free to take

<sup>3</sup> *Servant of India*, October 9, 1930, p. 487.

up any question without restriction, the Congress leaders demanded anticipatory commitments by it, some of which had no relation to the constitutional issue. The conciliatory attitude of Government was construed as surrender. The misapprehension was partly due to the rumour that Sapru and Jayakar were the emissaries of the Viceroy and that they acted at the instance of Sastri from England who was acting at the instance of the British Government. As a matter of fact, Sastri sent a cable to Mahatma Gandhi to receive the proposals of Sapru and Jayakar with sympathy only after they had, on their own initiative and in the public interest, undertaken the delicate task and sought the permission of the Viceroy to interview the Congress leaders in jail. As the Government declined to concede all the terms of the Congress leaders, the negotiations broke down, and the Congress refused to attend the Round Table Conference.

The British Government decided to proceed with the Conference with the representatives of other parties and issued invitations. Sastri was among the invitees. The inclusion of several Indian Princes came as a surprise to British Indians as it forboded a federation of British India and Princely India, which the Simon Commission had suggested.

The Round Table Conference was inaugurated by His Majesty the King-Emperor on November 12, 1930, with due pomp and ceremony befitting the occasion. The Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, presided. The opening speeches were general in content and inspiring in tone. Sastri's was by common consent among the best. He said that the Crown was the symbol of unity and the fountain of justice, freedom and equality among the peoples of the Commonwealth and any departure from these ideals amounted to disloyalty to it. The purpose of the Conference, he said, was to interpret liberally and translate courageously into concrete proposals two statements which the British Government had recently made, namely, that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress was Dominion Status and the immediate issue was the transfer to India of as large a share of government as she could, at the time, assume.

During the general discussion on November 17, 1930, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru of British India led off with a forceful speech in which he advocated Dominion Status and invited

the Princes to join in a Federation. The Maharaja of Bikaner, who followed and spoke for the Princes, supported the demand for Dominion Status and accepted the invitation to join the Federation. Sastri "crossed the floor" and owned himself a convert to Federation. Several factors induced the radical and surprising change in him. There was general agreement among the representatives of British India in favour of Dominion Status. But Dominion Status for British India would be impossible if Princely India stood out and sought the protection of the British Government. It would be possible only if the Dominion Government of India held sway not only over British India but also over Princely India. Such sway could be brought about if the British Government transferred to the Dominion Government its powers of paramountcy over the Princely States as long as they remained distinct. But the British Government and the Princes themselves were opposed to such a transfer. The only alternative was Federation if Dominion Status was to be achieved. When the Princes supported Dominion Status and offered to join in a Federation, Sastri's opposition to Federation was weakened. It was further weakened when he learnt that a few days prior to the Round Table Conference the Princes and their advisers in London had already favoured Federation and Sir Tej Bahadur was a party to it. To reject the offered Federation would rebuff the Princes and might drive them into opposition to Dominion Status. The Princes insisted that the representatives of the Princely States in the Federation would be nominated by them, while the representatives of British India would be elected by the people. This was a grave deduction from a democratic federation. The objection to such a contradiction was softened when the Princes avowed that democracy was seeping into their States from British India, that they were moving with the times, though somewhat slowly, and that they would take increasing interest in the welfare of their people. Further, the British Conservatives and the Britishers in India were strongly opposed to Dominion Status for British India alone and might view with less disfavour Dominion Status for a Federation which included the Princes as a counterpoise to the Indian National Congress. Sastri shared the hope of some other representatives of British India that, once Dominion Status was in operation in a Federation, it would be possible to stimulate the

pace of representative and democratic institutions in the Princely States and bring them into line with similar institutions in British India. A transition period was necessary even for the British Government to complete the transfer of power to the Indian Dominion Government. During the same period, the institutions in the Princely States could be democratised. A transition period was also necessary for the elimination of separate electoral rolls and weightages based on race and religion. Progress at the moment towards the goal of Dominion Status was conditioned by transitory deviations from strict democracy in order to win the support of the British, the Princes and the Muslims, who all supported Federation, though for different reasons. Sastri declared his conversion to Federation at the plenary session of the Conference on November 20, 1930. He said:

"The idea of Federation, I must confess, is comparatively new to me. I struggled hard against it until the other day. Now I confess I am a convert. I have listened both in private and at this Table to the Princes and their spokesmen, and may I say, with all due respect to them, that they have brought me round to their view both by the sincerity of their declarations as to Dominion Status and by the tone of restraint and moderation in which they have spoken of the terms of the Federation itself."

He then uttered a word of caution. He hoped that nothing would be done on the side of those who cared for Federation more than for Dominion Status, to weaken the latter, just as nothing should be done on the side of those who cared for Dominion Status more than Federation, to weaken the Federation.

Sastri was disappointed that the procedure he had suggested for discussing the Federation proposal at the Round Table Conference was not followed, for the failure to do so added unduly to the bargaining power of the Princes. Prior to the opening of the Conference, he suggested that the proposal should emanate from the Princes at the Conference and that British India should accept it because the Princes were the first, if only for their own reasons, to promote the idea. But the Maharaja of Bikaner and Sapru differed from Sastri. If a vote had been taken, Sastri would have won, but in order to avoid it, the meeting was suddenly dissolved.

In the event, Sapru spoke first in the Conference and invited the Princes to favour Federation as if to oblige British India. Sastri disclosed the background in his speech at the Federal Structure Committee on September 23, 1931. He said: "It is the Princes that started the idea of Federation. It is the Princes that drew us in, and it would not be too much to ask, therefore, that from the Princes some consideration is due to us for the difficulties of the British Indian side." Part of the unexpected support for Federation from the British, the Princes and the Muslims was due to the apprehension that the Dominion Government of India would be dominated by the Indian National Congress which had declared for independence outside the Commonwealth and had given notice that the financial relations between India and Britain would be scrutinised and unjustified obligations would be repudiated. Though the Congress was not represented at the Conference, its policies were feared. A Federation which was loaded pretty heavily with autocratic Princes and was given minimum powers, while the federating units had maximum possible powers as well as residuary ones, would act as a powerful restraint on the Congress. Referring to the prevailing fear Sastri said that it was natural but it was up to Indians to convince the British people that either the fear might be countered by cautionary measures or that it had no foundation in fact. He argued that it was unfounded, for the non-cooperators were not hereditary criminals or savage barbarian hordes; they were not sworn enemies of Great Britain or of British institutions. "They are men of culture, men of honour, most of them men who had made their mark in the professions. They are our kinsmen both in spirit and by blood. It is a sense of political grievance that has placed them in this position, which we view with so much distrust and so much disapprobation. Remove that discontent, and you will find them alongside of you, working the new constitution that we shall frame to its highest issues and drawing from those new institutions that we frame all the benefit of which they are capable." He concluded by making an eloquent and stirring appeal for consultation.

"The toils and trials of public life are well known to us all. I have never been within proximity of the gaol, but I am a political agitator. I know how near I am to those whose methods



I join with you in condemning today. Often in my life has the Government viewed my activities with suspicion and set its spies upon me. My life has not been one of unalloyed happiness; my way has not been free from thorns. And, Prime Minister, your experience is not altogether foreign to them. Let us not be carried away in this matter, then, too much by a sense of self-righteousness. Very little indeed divided those who now champion law and order and those who, impelled by the purest patriotism, have found themselves on the other side. Adopt measures born of conciliation; set the constitution of India in proper order; and we, whom this political difference has unhappily divided, will find ourselves once more cooperators for the welfare and contentment and ordered progress of India. Therein lies the strength of the situation today. Our enemies are not bad men; they are good men whom we have alienated by unfortunate political happenings. It is easy to bring them round. Let us make an honest attempt and, by God's grace, our work shall be rewarded both here and in India and we shall find India once more not only happy within her borders but also a contented partner in the British Commonwealth."<sup>4</sup>

Sastri was appointed to several sub-committees of the Conference, and among them to the Federal Structure and Minorities sub-committees which were perhaps the most important and controversial. Much discussion took place at informal meetings between various groups. The most difficult problem was the nature of reservations and safeguards for various interests, the Princes, the British, the Muslims, the Scheduled Castes, the Services, Defence, etc. Both by temperament and on account of his uncertain health, Sastri shrank from acrimonious discussions and disputes and suffered a great deal and had often to withdraw from meetings and take rest. He often felt depressed that the Indian delegates, by their endless disputes staged in London, created a very bad impression on Britishers.

At the final plenary session of the Conference on January 19, 1931, Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald made a statement on behalf of the British Government. The new constitution was to be a Federation of British India and Princely India, with responsibility of the executive to the legislature, subject to several safeguards and reservations. It is significant that the official statement did not use the

<sup>4</sup> *Servant of India*, December 11, 1930, p. 603.

phrase "Dominion Status" and followed the discredited Simon Commission. In his final speech on the occasion, Sastri pleaded with the Princes that they should not only support Federation but also develop democratic institutions in their own States for the redemption of their subjects.

Before the conclusion of the Conference, Sastri was honoured with the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh at an imposing ceremony. He returned to India on February 6, 1931. Along with several other delegates who returned by the same boat, he signed a statement to the press on the work of the Conference. It said that opinion in Britain had undergone a remarkable change in favour of India's claim for self-government as an equal partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations and that the attainment by India of Dominion Status with transitional safeguards was no longer in dispute. While recognising the sovereignty and autonomy of the Indian States with respect to their internal affairs, the proposed Federation marked the beginning of the process of unification of British India and Princely India, which was full of beneficent possibilities to India. The proposed "safeguards" were transitory and subject to further examination and did not affect the substance of Responsible Government, while protecting the rights of the minorities as well as of women. The statement concluded: "Speaking with a full sense of responsibility, we [the signatories] firmly maintain that the political outlook has so materially changed that the new situation should be calmly and dispassionately considered by all parties in India with a single eye to the abiding interest of India as a whole. If there are defects and shortcomings in the constitution proposed, they should be examined in a spirit of mutual confidence by a free and frank exchange of views, and we earnestly appeal to all sons and daughters of India to unite in bringing into existence an atmosphere of peace and goodwill so that all political parties acting in concert may complete the task begun in London and help India to secure her rightful place as an equal partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations."<sup>5</sup>

The delegates from British India were severely criticised for having agreed to Federation on the conditions exacted by the Princes and, thereby, crippled democracy. Sastri received more than his share of it because of his sudden con-

<sup>5</sup> *Servant of India*, February 12, 1931, p. 82.

version to Federation. Some of his colleagues in the Servants of India Society were bitterly disappointed and accused him of having subordinated himself to Sapru and surrendered to the Princes. In a letter dated, London, July 3, 1931, to a member of the Servants of India Society, Sastri explained:

"My colleagues gently censure me for lack of firmness. Perhaps the charge is true. I will make this plea though. My weakness only damaged my personal reputation; it did no harm to public interest. Sapru was easily the most influential and able of us all; and aggressive though he was towards his Liberal colleagues generally, there never was a question of his patriotism and unselfishness. Why weaken his hands? So I reasoned and kept a back seat. Now and then I differed with him and said so."

He then proceeded to elaborate his philosophy regarding negotiations and the need to save the Round Table Conference which was already weak because of its boycott by the Congress.

"Here let me state what seems to be fundamental difference of standpoint. Some persons would cap their criticism by complete dissociation and refuse to share responsibility for a scheme in which they saw glaring defects. I am not less keen in finding fault, but in cases of cardinal importance I cannot bring myself to stand out and say I disown it all. The need of a settlement today is paramount; the Round Table Conference is at work for the purpose. I take full share in the discussion and in the shaping of the plan. Unless the result is something fantastically absurd or unworkable, I think it my duty to stand by it. And it will need some strong and unflinching support, if it is to save the situation.

"Don't mistake me, please. I admit all your criticism. It is not too late to rectify some of the defects. Let us try our best to improve the scheme. When we have done our best, a keen eye will detect serious flaws. That, however, should not cause us to abandon the child and run away."

He concluded by uttering the gentle word which should turn away wrath.

"One word more. I am aware of the drift in the Society. In

me some of you are disappointed. Occasionally you have had to hang down your heads in humiliation at my doings and sayings. That you have borne with me so long is eloquent testimony to the generosity of your nature. I am full of gratitude for the brotherly love and kindness which I have received and ask for a continuance of the same treatment for yet awhile. Pray do not look too closely to my deserts.”<sup>6</sup>

Events have justified Sastri more than his critics in and out of the Servants of India Society. Dominion Status for British India alone was impracticable if the Princes and the British combined to retain British paramountcy over the Indian States and for that purpose maintained armed forces in India under British Command. Most of the States were *enclaves* in British India, and British armies would have to march through the Dominion of India to reach most of the Indian States. Dominion Status was possible only for the whole of India, including British India and Princely India, and that only when the two combined to eliminate British supremacy over both. That was possible only when the two formed a Federation, or when British paramountcy was transferred to the Dominion Government of British India. When the Princes held back from Federation after the Government of India Act of 1935 was passed, even Responsible Government for British India fell through. It was only when the British decided to quit both British India and the Indian States in 1947 that it was possible for British India to assume in effect paramountcy over the Indian States and finally abolish them as separate entities, and attain full Dominion Status. The key to Dominion Status for British India was in the hands of the British in 1930, as in 1947.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, pp. 303-04.

## SECOND ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

ON his return to India from the First Round Table Conference on February 6, 1931, Sastri rejoined the Labour Commission in Delhi and met Mahatma Gandhi at Allahabad and cooperated with Sapru and Jayakar in persuading the Congress to attend the Second Round Table Conference to complete the work begun in the First. The Mahatma had raised with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, several issues, most of which had no relation to the constitutional problems and which seemed of small moment to Sastri, though the Mahatma put a high premium on them. It was given principally to Sastri to secure agreement between the Viceroy and the Mahatma, for if the latter respected anybody more than any other, it was Sastri. In a personal letter, dated February 23, 1931, to a friend, Sastri wrote: "Gandhi seems in a conciliatory mood. Irwin has touched his heart. I prepared each for the other and feel rewarded. They say his influence over the Congress Working Committee is supreme and will prevail over Jawaharlal and others. It looks so. Events make it necessary for him to seek peace. True he lays down difficult conditions. For a wonder, Irwin is willing patiently to discuss every single point, allow for the natural weaknesses of Congressmen and meet the demand as far as possible. In some cases, his response far exceeds my expectation; so there is hope."<sup>1</sup>

Agreement between the Mahatma and the Viceroy was finally reached on March 5, 1931. The Congress agreed to discontinue Civil Disobedience and participate in the Second Round Table Conference. It accepted Federation, subject to safeguards and reservations "in the interests of India" with

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 302.

respect to Defence, External Affairs, etc. By the Agreement, the Congress and the Mahatma set their seal of approval on Federation and safeguards, and effectively weakened opposition to them in India. Soon after the conclusion of the Agreement, Sastri spoke at several places in India and defended the conclusions of the Round Table Conference.

Sastri sailed for England on April 18, 1931, to give evidence on behalf of the Government of India before the Joint Select Committee of both Houses of the British Parliament on East Africa in June, reference to which has been made elsewhere. After finishing this work, Sastri wished to return to India, but was asked to stay on in England for the Second Round Table Conference which was expected to meet any day. But it met only in September, 1931. The great delay was due to the change in the person of the Viceroy and the attitude of the British bureaucracy in India. Lord Irwin, who negotiated the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, left India soon after and was succeeded by Lord Willingdon who was less sympathetic to the Mahatma and the Congress and who supported the bureaucracy which was opposed to implementing the Gandhi-Irwin Pact sincerely and zealously.

In the meanwhile, Sastri was busy in England with interviews and speeches in the cause of India. He attended a lunch given by Mr. Evelyn Wrench, of the *Spectator*, to meet Mr. Villers, of the European Association in India and a lecture by him at the Foreign Affairs Association. Villers explained that the Europeans favoured central responsibility only because of the inclusion of the Princely representatives by nomination and other safeguards. Sastri took part in the discussion of Lord Zetland's paper before the East Indian Association and emphatically contended that the Mahatma and the Congress should be free to reopen the conclusions "noted" at the First Round Table Conference, as even those who participated in it had reserved liberty to reconsider them on the emergence of the whole picture. At a meeting at the Friends House, Sastri assured that the Mahatma was coming to London to fulfil and not to destroy the work of the First Conference. He was gratified that, notwithstanding Churchill's opposition, the Conservatives in Britain favoured an early resumption of the Round Table Conference, and that Lloyd George disowned his fellow-Liberal, Sir John Simon. There was, however, much bitter-

ness in Britain against the Indian National Congress because of the boycott of British cloth and the depression in Lancashire. The Indian mill-owners in Bombay were accused of having supported the Congress boycott of British cloth to feather their own nests and appear patriotic also. As a matter of fact, the depression in Lancashire was due more to Japanese competition than to Indian boycott. At the same time, the Christian missionaries, who were annoyed with the Mahatma because he disapproved of proselytisation, created an atmosphere unfavourable to him and the Round Table Conference.

News arrived in London that, as no communal settlement was reached in India, the Mahatma, who was to be the sole representative of the Congress, had told the Congress Committee that he would not go to London but that he was overruled and mandated to proceed to London. Sastri sent a cable to the Mahatma supporting the mandate and inviting him to give whole-hearted cooperation to the Round Table Conference as the only salvation for India. He pleaded with the Mahatma to tread the well-tried path of co-operation and reminded him that God fulfilled himself in many ways. A solution for the communal problem which suggested itself to the Mahatma was adult franchise, to which some of his colleagues were opposed. Sastri advised him not to contemplate adult franchise at the time. The Mahatma cabled back to say that he would attend the Conference if at all it was possible for him to do so.

Sastri arrived in Paris on July 5, 1931. He took ill with cold and fever and was confined to bed for about a week. Nevertheless, he insisted on keeping his engagement to speak on July 6 on "India Today" under the chairmanship of M. Albert Thomas, the Director of the International Labour Office, Geneva, who specially came to Paris for the purpose. A local heart specialist, who was called in, strongly advised Sastri to cancel the engagement, but failed. He prescribed some medicine, some pills, which gave quick and sure, though temporary, relief. Thereafter, Sastri carried those pills with him always, and whenever he had an acute attack of angina pectoris, a pill or two gave him quick relief.

At the lecture, Sastri spoke of the great and thrilling drama of the meeting in Delhi of two great personalities, Mahatma Gandhi and Lord Irwin, which resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. No man approximated to Christ, said

Sastri, more than the Mahatma, who had introduced new methods of political agitation, which, though unconstitutional, were nevertheless non-violent. Lord Irwin was a man of singular purity and greatness of character, brought up in orthodox Christian surroundings. What seemed impossible did happen when the two met. The Mahatma was a great mystic also, and like all philosophical anarchists, disbelieved in the government of man by man while the Viceroy was the representative of the greatest political power in the world, an Empire second to none in its power and majesty and the scope for political development within it. Sastri also refuted the prevalent notion that India was not fit for democratic government. Having been apt pupils of British democracy, Indians might develop a new kind of democracy which the West might be willing to emulate. If some people in Britain grudged the extension of democracy to India, Sastri hoped that India would never grudge the extension to Britain of the better democracy she might evolve.

While in Paris, Sastri met His Highness Sir Sayajirao Gaekwar of Baroda, visited the Institute of Indian Civilisation of Professor Sylvian Levi and the Colonial Exhibition, and witnessed the celebrations of the French National Day, July 14.

On his return to London, Sastri participated in the discussion on Sir Hubert Carr's paper at the East Indian Association and insisted that constitutional safeguards to protect British commercial interests in India against discrimination were opposed to Dominion Status and urged that Sir Hubert, who had supported Dominion Status, could not in the same breath ask for such safeguards. The better alternative was for British interests to negotiate with the Dominion Government of India and regulate commercial relations by a convention. A nationality law might permit Britons to become Indian nationals, but as long as they chose to remain non-nationals, it was humiliating to impose constitutional restraints on India from discriminating against non-nationals, a right which every Dominion enjoyed and exercised. Any convention entered into at the time was only an imposition by a superior authority over an inferior one. Only a free India could negotiate a convention as between equals. Even the Indian National Congress, whose attitude the British commercial interests at the time distrusted, would perhaps be willing, as the Government of



free India, to accord to the British the privileges that they sought.

Till the very last moment it was uncertain if the Mahatma would go to London. One of his conditions was that Dr. M. A. Ansari, the Nationalist Muslim, should be included in the Indian Delegation. The Muslim League objected and won. Finally, after a last-moment interview with the Viceroy in Simla, the Mahatma agreed to sail. He had to travel by a special train to catch the boat in Bombay on August 29, 1931.

Before the Conference met, Sastri expounded the policy of the Indian Liberals in a speech which was put on the air by the British Broadcasting Corporation. While all Indian political parties paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi and there were many elements common to them all, there were still some significant differences between them. All desired that India should soon be free and be the equal of Britain. The Liberals retained faith in Britain, while Mahatma Gandhi lost his very recently as the result of some unhappy events. But his participation in the Round Table Conference would be constructive. "His critics in this country will have the surprise of their lives when they discover how easily the tenderness and chivalry of his nature can be touched and how privations of the flesh and wounds of the soul have left his reason without a cloud." But that did not mean that the Liberals approved of the Mahatma's Civil Disobedience, which provoked a debauch of emotionalism, corrupted and coarsened young hearts and held out wild hopes of impossible prosperity and happiness and which exalted irreverence and disregard of law as virtues and which would menace society for a long time and be a thorn in the side of an indigenous government. He exclaimed:

"Alas for the perversity and contradictoriness of our nature! Though non-violence was the creed, love and peace the watchwords, and meekness and suffering the only means to be employed, the air resounded with cries of campaigns and war councils, marches and raids.... Boys and girls enlisted in the 'National Army'; and passionate appeals and provocations and incitements proper to a state of war were made day after day to all ranks and conditions of men. What if destructive weapons were not employed? War reigned in the breasts of Congressmen

... to such an extent that one could not truthfully describe it all as a manifestation of soul-force."

Sastri confessed that the Liberals did not foresee the magnitude of the people's response to the Mahatma's propaganda; they had not made the political education of the masses their duty, and the discovery came to them as a shock. The Government officials were even less in touch with public opinion and did not realise the gravity of the situation.

What was the remedy, asked Sastri, and answered that the Round Table Conference held the only promise of finding a satisfactory one. Some had argued that a communal settlement should precede the political development but he felt that the latter should not wait on the former. He still hoped the unexpected might happen and the communal problem might be solved by agreement. Failing it, he suggested arbitration. "If arbitration was good to solve international disputes, as contemplated by the League of Nations, it might be adopted to solve the communal dispute in India. If it is not right for the Mussalmans to block progress because their demands are not met, it is no more right for the Congress to hold up things because their ideal solution is unattainable." Sastri insisted that the constitutional safeguards and reservations should be in the "interests of India" and not a cloak for British interests to be invoked by the Viceroy at his discretion. He advocated that the Instrument of Instructions to the Viceroy should clearly state that they should be used only in the interests of India, though the better alternative was to drop them altogether and trust to the goodwill and good sense of India. In conclusion, Sastri said:

"To sum up the position of the Liberal or Centre Party in India: we stand firmly by the magnanimous and far-sighted policy of conciliation adopted by Lord Irwin as the only policy that will save India and Britain. We believe in the British connection and would strive for its maintenance, but only on a footing of complete equality within the Commonwealth, nowise inferior in status to any of the Dominions. We are opposed to direct action and hope, with the aid of the new spirit which makes for universal peace, to achieve the destiny of our motherland through constitutional means. We shall work for a lasting

and honourable understanding between the various communities of India, so that all might work together for her welfare and be welded together into one nation. Towards these high ends the Round Table Conference appears to us to be the only efficacious means. When through its agency the present acute dispute is ended and something like normal conditions are restored, we have full faith that we have a great part to play under the banner of peace, progress and all-round reform."<sup>2</sup>

The Second Round Table Conference, which began on September 7, 1931, was attended by Mahatma Gandhi as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. While it elaborated the scheme of Federation, it was dominated by the problem of Minorities. The prospect changed for the worse not only because of the claims and demands of the Mahatma but also by the change in the British Cabinet in August and in the British Parliament in October and above all, by the change in the person holding the office of the Secretary of State for India. In August, a National Government was formed with Sir Samuel Hoare of the Conservative Party, as the Secretary of State for India, though Ramsay Macdonald of the Labour Party continued to be the Prime Minister. In October, there was a General Election, which returned to Parliament a large majority of Conservatives who were averse to conceding central responsibility and federation. The Mahatma, for his part, alienated the British members by demanding independence without any reservations or safeguards; he alienated most of the Indian members by claiming to represent all the Indian communities in British India, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians and the Depressed Classes. In India, the British Bureaucracy and the Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, used their influence to sabotage Dominion Status, Federation and Communal Agreement. They would tolerate only provincial autonomy and even that subject to safeguards to be operated by the British. The British community and commercial interests in India, the Princes, the Muslims and the Depressed Classes raised their claims for special and excessive representation, which would make a mockery of Dominion Status and Democracy and Federation.

Sastri took his full share in the discussions in the com-  
? *Servant of India*, July 16, 1931, p. 342.

mittees and in informal and private meetings of select individuals, which often strained his heart as well as his optimism. The chief problem regarding Federation was whether the representation of the Princely States should be by popular election as in British India or by nomination by the Princes. The Princes insisted on their sovereign right to nominate, while some British Indians pleaded for election. Mahatma Gandhi was unwilling to antagonise the Princes or agree to nomination. His strategy was to consent to nomination formally and privately persuade the Princes to adopt election as far as was then possible. He was of the view that the Princes acted as they did because of their fear of the Political Department and was confident that, once Federation was formed and British paramountcy was eliminated, they would soon read the writing on the wall and readily accept election. The first desideratum was freedom for India from British control, and for that, the help of the Princes was essential, even at a heavy price. On the communal question, the Mahatma was willing to tolerate separate electorates for the Muslims and the Sikhs, but not for the Depressed Classes. The Muslims took the view that unless all their demands were acceded, they would agree only to Provincial Autonomy and oppose Central Responsibility as well as Federation. All the Minorities signed a pact more or less to this effect, partly because they resented the Mahatma's claim to represent them all. Except the Indian Liberals like Sastri and the British Labour Members like Wedgwood Benn and H. B. Lees Smith, all other members of the Conference, including the Mahatma, were anxious to wind up the Conference precipitately and blame others for it.

At the instance of Sapru, the Mahatma met Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald and Lord-Chancellor Sankey the evening before the Conference met. Sastri was present. A few days later the Mahatma confided to Sastri that he would demand control over the Indian Army, and if it was refused, he would walk out. At one stage, the Mahatma disclosed that he would accept Provincial Autonomy without Central Responsibility. Sastri, along with some others, vigorously protested, and the Mahatma came round. On October 1, the Mahatma had a long talk with Sastri and revealed that he had made up his mind to demand that "independence" should be granted in the first

instance, and that the question of communal settlement should be referred to arbitration by a board of judges, acceptable to all the minorities. Sastri felt that some transitional reservations regarding Defence and Foreign Affairs were inevitable, but he agreed with the Mahatma that there was no need for financial safeguards. He also agreed with the Mahatma that the communal problem should be referred to arbitration. At the instance of Sapru, Sir Samuel Hoare met the Mahatma at the Dorchester Hotel, when Sastri was present. The Mahatma and Hoare got into a discussion about British rule in India and failed to reach the subjects relevant to the Conference. On another occasion, the Mahatma came to discuss the representation of Labour in the new Constitution with Sastri and some other members of the Conference. He reached the subject only in the last two minutes of the long interview and agreed somewhat casually that Labour should be a Federal subject.

The communal problem dominated the proceedings, formal and informal, of the Conference. His Highness the Aga Khan broadcast a speech to America setting out the Muslim case. Some Hindu leaders, like Malaviya and Jayakar, thought that it needed some corrective and drafted a statement which Sastri also signed. No newspaper in London, except the *Manchester Guardian*, published it. *The Times* published a message from Simla that the statement was resented by the Muslims in India. Jayakar was furious, but Sastri just let it go.

The wrangling about the communal settlement went on interminably, each trying to put the others in the wrong and seeking adjournments to avoid breakdowns of negotiations but without any hope of a settlement. In one of their mutual talks, the Mahatma said to Sastri that even if the Liberals did not support him, he would give priority to the demand for full independence and defer the communal problem to be subsequently settled by arbitration by a board of judges acceptable to all the parties concerned. He realised that in taking that line, he would stand alone. But he did not mind it; he would not mind the breakdown of the Conference; he would return to India and forge more effective sanctions. He had offended Dr. B. R. Ambedkar by insisting that he, the Mahatma, and not Ambedkar, represented the Scheduled Castes. He formed the impression that the Princes were making impossible demands at the

behest of the Political Department, but that when British paramountcy was withdrawn, they would conform to the democratic pattern. The Princes, however, were not agreed as to how the quota of representation for the Princes should be allocated between the nearly six hundred States, some large and some small. Sir Mirza Ismail, the Dewan of Mysore, saw no hope of agreement between the Princes and requested the British Government to decide.

The Mahatma's suggestion that the communal problem might be referred to arbitration by Indians was opposed by the Hindu leaders as they feared that the arbitrator would be the Mahatma himself, and he would give a blank cheque to the Muslims. Sastri expressed the view that whatever be the demerits of communal electorates, they could not be abolished without the consent of the Muslims, and pleaded that the Depressed Classes might be content with reservation in joint electorates. The Mahatma was hurt that neither the Muslims nor the Hindus trusted him and insisted that the Congress, and he for the Congress, more truly represented all the communities in India. Smuts of South Africa took a hand. He felt that the breakdown of the Conference would be a major disaster and offered to mediate for a settlement even as he did in the Irish dispute some years ago. The Mahatma was greatly touched by the interest evinced by Smuts and hoped that Smuts and Irwin would be able to suggest an acceptable solution. But nothing came of it.

The final plenary session of the Conference began on November 28 and concluded on December 1, 1931. The proposals concerning Federation had not received the consent of the Muslim members of the British Indian Delegation who boycotted the Committee until the Minorities question was settled to their satisfaction. The Committee on Minorities reported failure to reach an agreement. Sastri spoke last on November 30 and before the Prime Minister made his Statement of Government Policy the next day. In the course of his speech delivered after midnight, Sastri pointed out that the consent to the proposals of the Conference was "conditional" and subject to review when the whole picture became clearer. He wished that the Prime Minister had made his Statement on behalf of the British Government earlier and that it formed the basis of discussion rather than the reports of the Committees.

Though his original plea was for Dominion Status for British India, Sastri had become a convert to the idea of Federation and would not go back on it. "We have all yielded our hearts to that great ideal. Our whole deliberations have been framed on the supposition that the Princes would come in, and I know nothing now to the contrary. It is a pity to ask us to go back to the original and smaller idea. I shall leave that subject there, hoping that we shall be permitted to contemplate this vision of an India, including the Princes and their States, going forward as a Dominion from strength to strength and taking her place amongst the sisterhood of Nations of the great Commonwealth." He referred to his loyalty to the Commonwealth and pleaded that India should be enabled to be proud of it! "I am one of those who, amidst much adverse criticism, have often made that confession of faith with honesty and with genuine trust. Prime Minister, what is wanting in our loyalty to the Commonwealth is not admiration for its greatness or of its material glory, but it is the lack of occasion for us to take pride in this Empire and to call it our own. The one thing wanting is that you should place us upon equality with the self-governing parts of the Commonwealth. We have asked for that status for a long, long time, and although I do not wish to be so unfaithful to history as to say that you have done nothing whatever and although I am grateful for the steps you have taken from time to time to realise this ideal, it must be admitted that progress has been slow and fitful. The time has now come for you to take one long step from which there shall be no returning." He insisted that nothing should be done beyond what was absolutely necessary and unavoidable to mark off India, especially to her disadvantage, from the other Dominions. He felt that reservations written into the Constitution were "unnecessary and irritating deductions from Dominion Status." He had no serious objection to them on merits, but they were a blot on the face of the Constitution and a humiliation to India. He had been no party to the secret and intimate confabulations which led to the framing of the safeguards in their present form. If they should still be retained in the Constitution and were in the interests of India, he suggested that they should be open to revision by the Indian Legislature without needing the sanction of the British Parliament. He feared that as long as they had

to come to the British Parliament again, it would be hotly contested at every General Election in India and cause trouble between Britain and India. Ignorant candidates would play on the minds of even more ignorant voters and tell them: "We are not a free country so long as these clauses are there in the Constitution." He also suggested that the Instrument of Instructions to the Viceroy should make it clear that the "safeguards" should be exercised by him "solely in the interests of India." There should be some safeguard against the possible abuse of safeguards. He then suggested that the future work of the Conference should not be left to the bureaucracy in Britain and India but should be entrusted to politicians. Referring to the "admonitions and exhortations" of the Prime Minister to the members of the Conference on a previous occasion, he said: "For many years in the wilderness of private membership, now enlarged and corrected by some years of the most exalted and difficult office in the Empire, you have garnered the lesson that noble political ideals, generous national aspirations, do not thrive in official bosoms. We, non-officials, engender them, cherish them, and know how to bring them to fruition. In the long corridors and haunts of the India Office and of the great Secretariat that we have built in New Delhi there are many dark places where these beautiful and moving ideals are apt to be strangled or at least they will be delayed until they have no further significance to those who have been deeply interested in them." Among the statesmen and politicians to be entrusted with the task of carrying forward the work of the Conference, Mahatma Gandhi should be included.

Then, turning dramatically to the Mahatma, Sastri made a most vigorous exhortation and moving appeal for his cooperation.

"Yes, Mahatma, if I may apostrophise you, forgetting for a moment the Prime Minister, your duty hereafter is with us. You have acquired an unparalleled reputation. Your influence is unequalled. Your spiritual power to command men and to raise them above themselves is acknowledged all over the world. Shall not these great gifts be harnessed to the constructive work of the nation? Have you the heart, I ask you, still to lead your people, trustful and obedient, through the valley of humiliation if it be not necessary—and I contend it is no longer necessary?



The steps that we have taken so far round this table mark a distinct stage in advance. It may not be as satisfactory as you wish. It is certainly not as satisfactory as I wish. Nevertheless, it seems to me that you and I and other friends here, working together, can frame this constitution and so shape it that, while deriving the most that it can yield, we can also look forward with confidence to a future when we shall be enabled to perfect it and that at no distant date.

"The thing is in our hands today. This Imperial Parliament, dominated as it may be by a Conservative majority, this Imperial Parliament in its debates tomorrow and the day after will set its *imprimatur*, I am perfectly assured, on the declaration that the Prime Minister makes tomorrow, a few hours from now. Yes, and when that work is done, believe me, Mahatma, that in your hands more than those of any other single Indian lies our future progress. Remember the days when some of us here ran between Raisina and Daryagunj to bring Lord Irwin and you together in mutual understanding and mutual cooperation. Yes, it seems to me that you cannot but have seen during those several weeks that you have worked with us that there is some knowledge, some wisdom, some patriotism even outside the ranks of the Congress which you so much worship. We can be of some use to you. Take us in hand. Do not dismiss us as people whose ideas are still evolving and may be long in reaching the heights of Congress wisdom. Believe me that with you and your chosen associates we can fashion our constitution to great ends, and India will have cause to be truly thankful that you changed your plans and came here. For the work of a great country like India, a growing nation like our people, lies in many directions. There is not one road to the salvation of our people and patriotism takes many shapes and works in diverse ways according as circumstances require. The circumstances today demand that you should change your plans, dismiss Civil Disobedience from your mind and take up this work in a spirit of complete trust in us and of faith in the British people too. I want to tell you this. I have read some history, and, believe me, the British people often do wrong, the British people often take unwise courses. Nevertheless, in the long run they come back to ways of reason, moderation and justice. This is one such occasion when it seems to me that they are in their most winning and admirable mood. Take them now and victory is ours."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Servant of India*, December 24, 1931, p. 614.

Immediately after Sastri concluded, Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald made a reference to his speech. He said: "We have come to the end of these sittings and it only remains for me tomorrow to make the Government statement and to say to you *au revoir*. Although it is after two o'clock in the morning, I cannot leave this Chair without one word of tribute to that magnificent statement to which we have just listened. That statement shows an insight into the heart of India; but, my friends, it does more than that, it shows an insight into the heart of Great Britain, and, approached that way, your approach is bound to be irresistible."

The speech created a great impression. *The Times*, London, described it as "brilliant." It created a sensation also. Some Indian Members of the Conference and some leaders in India, while admiring its style, regretted its substance; they thought that Sastri was indiscreet and that he had let down the Mahatma and rebuked him in the presence of the Britishers. The Mahatma assured Sastri that he, for his part, did not take it ill, and added that, though Sastri and some others had advised him to accept what the British were prepared to give and arrive at a peaceful settlement, he was not fully satisfied with the British offer and had, therefore, no desire to enter into an agreement with them.

Sastri deplored the practice of political organisations in India tying the hands of their representatives at the Round Table Conference with inflexible mandates which made the phrase, the greatest common measure of agreement, meaningless. A treaty or pact, to which the parties were many, postulated that the various negotiators should have power to yield some points in the programme of those whom they represent in order to secure other points. The Mahatma came prepared for separate electorates for the Muslims and the Sikhs and unwilling to continue that privilege to other communities or grant it for the first time to the Depressed Classes. From this position he did not budge an inch to the end. He started by asking for complete popular control over defence and external affairs. No argument from any quarter could prevail on him to moderate this demand. On minor matters, like the examination of public debts, his attitude was equally firm. If he had only been a little more of a realist on the claims of the Minorities and on the reservations, what could he not have ac-

complished? To speculate was to be unhappy. He might have been the leader of a united Nationalist Party. But he preferred to be a mere Congress mandatory. "To enunciate principles, to fight for ideals, to make propaganda—these are high duties and require rare ability. But when agitation had come to a head, it is no ignoble part to make the most of the occasion and get the people some return for their sufferings."

The Prime Minister declared on December 1, 1931, that the British Government's policy favoured central responsibility on a federal basis, subject to transitional reservations and safeguards, and Provincial Autonomy in British India. A single statute would include both the aspects, to be implemented as far as possible simultaneously, though Provincial Autonomy need not necessarily wait if Federation should take time. Inasmuch as the Conference failed to arrive at an agreed solution to the Minorities question, the British Government would be compelled to supply a provisional scheme in order that constitutional progress might not be held up.

In proposing the vote of thanks to the Chair, the Mahatma announced that they had come to the parting of the ways. Nobody was more distressed than Sastri.

Both the Prime Minister and the Mahatma made sympathetic references to the strain on Sastri's feeble health. The Mahatma remarked that the Prime Minister had "worked almost to exhaustion" his "friend and leader, Mr. Sastri." There were several occasions when the strain of the Conference was so great on Sastri as to cause grave apprehension. One night, about three A.M., he dragged himself to my bed-side in the next room, woke me up, and in a low and feeble voice, as from the grave, confided that a few moments ago he thought his end had come and he would not live to tell the tale. He desired me to be near at hand for an emergency. Immediately, I moved into his bedroom and from then on slept only as long as my subconscious mind was conscious of the rhythm of Sastri's snoring and woke up with a start the moment it paused, to reassure myself that it was only a pause.

It was a very fortunate circumstance that, there were in London a young couple who conceived deep affection for Sastri and nursed him with great devotion when he was stricken and suffering, Moshe a handsome sculptor, and

Eva, his beautiful wife and model. In his letters, Sastri addressed them jointly as Emosa, a fanciful short for Eva and Moshe! They were attached to him as to a loving father and entertained him when he was well and nursed him when he was ill with filial love and solicitude. Day or night, a telephone message and they would drop everything and rush to his bed-side. She would sit by his side, lay her delicate hands tenderly on his forehead, pat him like a baby, call him "Srini," tell him stories and entertain him with light and pleasant talk. Such was her magic influence on him that in a few minutes he was fast asleep, happily snoring. Often and often, whenever the Conference proceedings grated on his sensitive soul and caused physical pain, he would make a bee-line to the home of Emosa to seek relief, to recover and return to the Conference. They were his fairly constant companions, walked with him in the park, lunched and dined with him at restaurants and cafes and saw pictures and plays with him. They accompanied him to Paris in July and to South Africa in December, 1931. On the voyage to Cape Town, Sastri spent hours with Emosa and other younger people, who travelled in the Second Class, and who hung on his neck, as it were, much to the envy of the many rather stodgy, solemn and elderly First Class passengers. During the Second Round Table Conference in Cape Town between India and South Africa, Eva and Moshe gave him their unsurpassed affection and devotion and said a fond, tearful and moving farewell as he left Cape Town on his way back to India, never to meet them again in the flesh. They kept up for some years a fairly regular correspondence, tender and loving and romantic. From his happy home in Madras, Sastri once wrote:

My dear Moshe,

Having plenty of time to mope, I muse very often. One thought occurs again and again.

What a god-sent, brother, you were to me in London! I asked you boldly to give me a home. You gave me, you and Eva, the most affectionate, charming, noble home I have had or likely to have. Remember where I write from. I am very happy here. Still, Eva and you gave me a vast deal which I miss and miss sorely.

How can I ever repay or even thank you adequately? I am

your debtor for life and can't be redeemed.

How you loved and trusted me! No friend in all the world like you. God bless you!

Yours most affectionately,  
V. S. Srinivasan.

In one of his letters to Eva, he said: "Dear, even you don't know all that you mean to me." In another he said:

"Need I say how greatly I enjoyed your letter and blessed you for it? Don't weary, I pray you of well-doing. . . . Unsatisfying though it be, I look at your little picture now and then, and get some relief. Fate has come between us, I fear, with no gentle designs. . . . Dear, tell me, goddess that you are, if I meet you after a year or so, will you be the same to me? How diffident I am! And what a sad thought! Let me turn from it."

During the Conference on September 22, 1931, Sastri celebrated his sixty-second birthday with a dinner party which was attended by some of his personal friends and included Sir Mirza M. Ismail, Sir Pheroze Sethna, Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, Sir Benegal and Lady Rama Rao, Mr. K. Srinivasan and Mr. A. Rangaswami Iyengar. Sastri was in high spirits.

The Rev. John Haynes Holmes, an American admirer of Mahatma Gandhi, had an interview with Sastri and published a pen-picture of him in the *Unity* of Chicago of August 17, 1931. In the course of it he said:

"Of course, I saw Indians—there are many of them in London. Most important among them perhaps is the distinguished Mr. Sastri, who played a great part in the last Round Table Conference and will do the same at the next. Thanks to his courtesy in dropping everything at a day's notice, I had an hour with him and received important information about India and the Empire. Mr. Sastri is a charming and also a most impressive individual. He is, in a way, the most highly Europeanised Indian I have ever seen. His appearance, his clothing, his speech are all Western. Were it not for the slight tinge of the skin and that liquid tenor quality in his voice, one might easily take him for an Englishman or American. His response to my questions was immediate. The light play of his features, the quick energy of his motions, the easy flow of his speech, these

were almost as illuminating as the extraordinarily clear ideas which were poured out on me. Mr. Sastri is optimistic about the future. Perhaps he finds it good policy to appear so, but at bottom he has facts, or what he thinks are facts, to sustain his hopes of an Indian settlement. He refuses, at any rate, to be discouraged by the extremists on both sides. . . . Mr. Sastri talked like a prudent far-seeing man whose labours are appointed as far ahead as he could see.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Servant of India*, October 1, 1931, p. 475.

## *SECOND CAPE TOWN CONFERENCE*

Soon after the conclusion of the Second Session of the Indian Round Table Conference in London, Sastri sailed direct for Cape Town to join the Indian Delegation to the Second Round Table Conference between India and South Africa. He was reluctant to do so. He had left India in April, 1931; his health was very unsatisfactory and often caused serious concern. He was, therefore, very anxious to return to his family in India and rest in Bangalore. But the situation in South Africa had reached another crisis, and he was asked to help. His resistance broke down when in the first week of November, 1931, Mahatma Gandhi emphatically pressed him to go to South Africa. That settled it once again.

As stated earlier, the status of Indians in the Transvaal, most of whom were traders, caused deep concern to Sastri in the last days of his Agency in South Africa. They were not tempted to take advantage of the voluntary Assisted Emigration Scheme and thereby reduce their number. On the other hand, the Condonation Scheme legalised the status of illegal entrants. Malan had promised that, if the number was not large, he would permit them to introduce their wives and minor children. The prospect was that there would be more Indian traders than less in days to come and it alarmed their European trade rivals. If the uplift of Indians was taken seriously, the white traders feared that they would fare worse. Voluntary boycott of Indian traders by Europeans, even when supported on occasions by the Dutch Reformed Church, failed. So some of them invoked somewhat ancient anti-Indian laws which were neither repealed nor enforced seriously in the past. Under the laws

as they stood, nobody could engage in trade without a licence; nobody was entitled to a licence who had no right to occupy or own premises; and Indians had no legal right to occupy or own land or premises in the Transvaal, except in locations set apart for them. In practice, however, Indians were allowed to trade in legally prohibited areas and acquired vested interests, sometimes through legal stratagems. For instance, Indians would own land by forming companies, and companies had no racial attribute in law. Or, they would own land in the names of their European friends and employees. In 1919, anti-Indian agitation led to a review of the situation and the then existing vested interests were protected. Alarmed with Sastri's growing influence and the danger from Indian uplift under the Cape Town Agreement, some European traders invoked the assistance of the courts of law to enforce the anti-Indian laws. The Johannesburg Municipality was embarrassed by a legal decision against Indian occupation of certain premises in that City and could not legally renew the trade licences of some Indians. On the eve of his departure, Sastri appealed to Hertzog and Malan of the Union Government, Hofmeyr, the Administrator of the Transvaal, and the Mayor of Johannesburg to intervene to save the threatened Indian traders and received sympathetic replies. The Johannesburg Municipality, precluded from renewing Indian licences, allowed Indians to trade without licences, pending some final solution. This enraged the white traders who were baulked of their objective. The Indian traders continued to trade on prohibited land and without having to pay licence fees, while white traders paid theirs. The Police authorities were embarrassed at having to condone trading without licences. The situation was further complicated by some judicial decisions which favoured the Indians. The campaign to oust Indian traders by legal actions by private white traders began to spread to the whole province of the Transvaal. The situation developed into a major crisis, and called for a solution.

The solution that appealed to the South African Government was segregation of Indians, a policy which they were persuaded to drop by the Cape Town Agreement. All the same, they introduced the Transvaal Asiatic Land Tenure Amendment Bill, which would compel Indians to sell out their assets within five years and shift to locations ear-



marked for them. The Indians claimed that in view of the "Uplift" promised in the Cape Town Agreement, the Bill should be withdrawn and all restrictions against Indians should be repealed. When the Government refused, they felt sorely disappointed and increasingly embittered and desperate and asked for a Second Round Table Conference to find a more acceptable solution. Failing which, they advocated the severance of diplomatic relations between India and South Africa and the recall of the Indian Agent in South Africa. They even contemplated resort to passive resistance.

In their agonised situation, they appealed to Sastri to revisit South Africa for a short while and intercede with the South African Government. But Sastri was unable to do so, as he was then engaged with the Royal Commission on Indian Labour. He, however, met in London Hertzog and some other South African Cabinet Ministers, who were there in connection with the Imperial Conference.<sup>1</sup>

Further, both the Indians and the anti-Indians in South Africa were dissatisfied with the working of the Cape Town Agreement, though for opposite reasons. The Indians were increasingly opposed to Assisted Emigration and the reduction of their number in South Africa. They were dissatisfied that the uplift promised in the Agreement was not implemented with any enthusiasm; instead, they were threatened with segregation and the curtailment of their few existing rights. Some of them felt that the Indian Agency was more a handicap than a help since it advocated compromise rather than heroic resistance. The anti-Indians, on the other hand, felt that the Assisted Emigration scheme had not sufficiently reduced the Indian population in South Africa, particularly in the Transvaal, and the "Uplift" Clause in the Agreement was a growing embarrassment because it raised expectations among Indians which could not be fulfilled. They increasingly resented being discredited by Indians who flung the "Uplift" Clause in their face and charged them with breach of faith. They felt it a humiliation that the Dominion of South Africa, equal to Britain in status, should have to consult India, a British Dependency, to legislate for the Indians in South Africa, over eighty per cent of whom were born locally and were South Africans. They were, therefore, determined to ter-

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Opinion*, December 19, 1930, p. 419.

minate the Cape Town Agreement and deal with their Indians as their domestic problem and without the interference of India. In any event, the Asiatic Land Tenure Bill was a purely domestic matter and had no place in the agenda of any Conference with India. On the other hand, the Indians were particular that the Bill should be a major item in the agenda. Deadlocks were inevitable.

The South African Government were persuaded to postpone consideration of their Bill to segregate Indians in the Transvaal till 1932, when a review of the Cape Town Agreement was due at a Second Round Table Conference. The Indian Delegation, which was announced in December, 1931, consisted of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, then Member of the Government of India in charge of Indians overseas, Sir Geoffrey Corbett, Sir Darcy Lindsay, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Sir K. V. Reddy, then Agent of the Government of India in South Africa, and Sastri, with Baipai as Secretary. Sastri and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu travelled direct from London and arrived in Cape Town on January 4, 1932. Sir Fazl-i-Hussain and the other members travelled from Bombay. The two sections of the Delegation were to meet in Pretoria and visit Johannesburg and some other places in the Transvaal. But Sastri was too ill to do the train journey to the Transvaal and so remained in Cape Town.

The Mayor of Cape Town gave a civil luncheon to the Delegates of the Conference on January 12, 1932. In responding to the Mayor's toast, Sastri made a brief and humorous speech in the course of which he endorsed the Mayor's plea that Municipal Councils should have no politics.

"The Mayor has told us that his Municipality knows no politics. But he did not tell us whether he meant that as a compliment to the Municipality or as a censure. [Laughter] If it is meant as a compliment, I personally endorse it. ['Hear, hear'] I know of other municipalities where 'hear, hear' would not be heard

"Some time ago we had a controversy in India on this subject, and I remember being rapped on the knuckles several times merely because I ventured to suggest that municipalities... should not concern themselves with those lines of division which, sometimes fortunately and at other times less fortunately, divide those who go in for the life of the larger representative body

which we call Parliament. May the Cape Town Council long continue to devote its attention exclusively to matters which come under its sphere!"

Then he playfully referred to the presence of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu in the Indian Delegation as a "mystery" to be cleared, and wondered if she asked or was asked! Quick came Mrs. Naidu's brilliant and impromptu reply:

"Mr. Sastri will be sorry that he demanded a public explanation. I only come here because my leader [Mahatma Gandhi] was not quite sure of the wisdom of the *men* of the East [Laughter] and insisted on its being reinforced by the immemorial wisdom of the women of the East!"<sup>2</sup>

The Round Table Conference met on January 12, 1932. Sastri, who was far from well, struggled bravely up the steps to the Conference room. Prime Minister Hertzog opened the proceedings. He thought that the earlier Conference of 1927 had been "fruitful" of the very greatest blessing to South Africa, no less than to India, in having inaugurated, fostered and encouraged a spirit of mutual goodwill and esteem as between the two countries, such as was completely unknown before. He hoped that the second Conference would be blessed with a similar harvest of goodwill and understanding.

In the absence of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, who had taken seriously ill and could not attend the Conference except at the very end, Sastri responded. Struggling against his heart-attack he spoke softly in a hushed voice. He underlined the Prime Minister's determination that the Conference should succeed like the former one.

Two items loomed large in the Conference: the Transvaal Asiatic Land Tenure Bill and the Cape Town Agreement. The South African Delegation was firm that the former was a domestic affair and could not be included in the formal agenda of the Conference. The Indian Delegation was equally firm to the contrary. Ultimately, a compromise was effected. The Bill was discussed but informally between two members from each side. The Indian Delegation pressed that the principle of segregation of Indians should be dropped from the Bill. This was finally agreed to.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Opinion*, January 22, 1932, p. 26.

The South African Delegation offered to protect existing vested rights as far as possible at the discretion of the Minister of the Interior. The agreement regarding the Bill was not published as part of the formal conclusions of the Conference.

As has already been stated, the South African Government was subjected to strong criticism that, though a sovereign Dominion, it had to wait on the consent of another Government to legislate with reference to its own subjects. The only consideration which reconciled it to consult India was the hope that India would help to reduce the Indian population in the Union. In 1914 Mahatma Gandhi had to agree to reduction of the then Indian population by voluntary repatriation in order to secure better rights for those who remained behind. Similarly, the Habibullah Delegation had to agree in 1927 to Assisted Emigration to reduce the Indian population if the Union Government was to drop segregation and promise "Uplift" to the residuary Indian population. It was admitted at the Second Round Table Conference that Assisted Emigration to India had exhausted its possibilities of reducing the Indian population in the Union. The only other way was to organise emigration to *other* countries, as envisaged in the Agreement of 1927. But it was to be "colonisation," to be promoted by both India and South Africa for Indians both from India and South Africa. The scheme was open to the consoling interpretation that Indians were not induced to emigrate from South Africa because they were "undesirables," but because India and South Africa were anxious to promote colonisation for the betterment of the colonisers, something like the Japanese colonisation in Brazil. In any event, it was to be voluntary and to a country selected by the two Governments and the South African Indian Congress. It was an improvement over Repatriation and Assisted Emigration.

The South African Delegates were dead against the renewal of the "Uplift" Clause in the Cape Town Agreement. The Indian Delegation insisted that it was that clause that reconciled them to the Colonisation idea. Ultimately, the Union Delegates agreed.

The Conference lasted longer than originally planned, due to deadlocks and protracted negotiations in reaching agreement. Its publication was further delayed because the Select Committee of the South African Parliament, which

drafted the Asiatic Land Tenure Bill, was reluctant to accept some of the recommendations of the Conference. In consequence, the conclusions of the Conference were announced only in the first week of April, 1932. The Cape Town Agreement was renewed, subject to the modification that Colonisation replaced Assisted Emigration. Some modifications in the Land Tenure Bill were also made.

The friendly *Natal Advertiser*, which thought that the Cape Town Agreement was a victory for India, felt that the Second Round Table Conference was a defeat to her. It observed that "the Indian Delegation has returned to India with empty hands," and that South Africa had politely given notice to India not to interfere on behalf of the Indian subjects of South Africa. It advocated that, since South Africa would not deal fairly with Indians, their best course was to find another country where they would not encounter racial discriminations.<sup>3</sup> The *Natal Witness*, equally friendly to Indians, said that India paid too high a price for the Agreement. It said: "As for the Cape Town Agreement, the application of the Colonisation Scheme would certainly be nothing short of the denial of the birth-right of a section of the population who have equal claim to consideration as any other section of the South African community."<sup>4</sup> The *Natal Mercury* always hostile to Indians, said that further cooperation between India and South Africa depended on the extent to which the Colonisation Scheme reduced the number of Indians in South Africa.

Sastri felt tolerably satisfied with the results of the Conference and commended them publicly. He said:

"Our brethren in the Transvaal have been relieved of the worst features of their recent trouble. No Indians will return to India unless they choose to do so. . . . The Uplift Clause continues. The Agent of the Government of India will, as during the last five years, watch over the interests of our countrymen and be their guide, friend and philosopher, besides serving as the medium of communication between the two Governments. A South African Indian chosen by the Congress will be a member of the committee which explores on behalf of the two Governments the possibilities of colonisation for Indians from both countries to such places as Brazil, British Guiana and Tan-

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Opinion*, April 15, 1932, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, April 15, 1932, p. 119.

ganyika. No period is prescribed for the life of the renewed Agreement."<sup>5</sup>

The Asiatic Land Tenure Bill, as revised at the instance of the Conference, deleted the clause which provided in terms for the segregation of Indians, but Sastri had no illusions that in practice it would to some extent be brought about.

Speaking on another occasion, he said: "Our countrymen live there in circumstances that do not make for self-satisfaction. There are many disabilities still. . . . Very often indeed their position is one that can be described as humiliating. . . . But it is not altogether that point of view from which our labours should be judged. It is with reference to the circumstances in which the Indian Delegation began their work that you must formulate your estimate of our work. Judged by the extremely perilous condition to which our countrymen had been brought, a condition verging on material ruin, the results that have been published . . . must be considered to be not unsatisfactory. More upon this head I ought not to say: less, perhaps. I could not well have said."<sup>6</sup>

Though the results were not as satisfactory to India as they might have been, Sastri was sure that Mahatma Gandhi would have appreciated them, if he had been consulted as on the previous occasion. But the Mahatma was in jail. In the course of his reply to the address presented to him and Sir Kurma Reddy by the Madras Municipal Corporation on April 26, 1932, Sastri referred to the value he attached to the opinion of the Mahatma and his anticipation of the Mahatma's assessment of the Conference. "Twice before it has fallen to my lot to return from South Africa after fulfilling certain missions. On both those occasions, it was felt by all my colleagues that the first thing to do on return to the shores of India was to go to Mahatma Gandhi and report to him of our doings. To no one could a prior report be made. If he approved of our work, that was enough. . . . How sad I must feel now you can imagine when it is not possible for me to make a similar report to the one man in all India who has a right to form a judgment of South African affairs and lead public sentiment

<sup>5</sup> *Indian Opinion*, May 6, 1932, p. 136

<sup>6</sup> *Servant of India*, May 5, 1932, p. 148.

in the country! But I have a feeling that if it had been possible to do so, as I did on the two previous occasions, the result would have been exactly similar. The Mahatma would, I think, have blessed our work and would have said that the Indian Delegation could not have done better.”<sup>7</sup>

The Indians in South Africa were dissatisfied with the results of the Conference. It was with great difficulty that they were persuaded to agree to the Colonisation Scheme; they were bitterly opposed to the Transvaal Land Tenure Act which left the fate of Indians in that province to the discretion of the Minister. The South African Indian Congress decided to boycott the Act and resort to passive resistance and suffer the consequences. They were sorry that the Indian Delegation and the Government of India were parties to the unwelcome agreements. But some Indian traders in the Transvaal broke away from the Congress and decided to conform to the Act.

When Sastri learnt of the resolve of the South African Indian Congress to resort to passive resistance to the Act, he felt deeply concerned lest the end should be worse than the beginning. He sent a cable to the Indian Agent in South Africa, Raja Sir Maharaj Singh:

“Talk of passive resistance alarms and grieves me. Our community is without doubt sorely tried and is passing through terrible crisis. But I am positive passive resistance is no remedy. It is likely to end in disaster. India herself is in travail and cannot help effectively though her heart bleeds. Pray plead in my name and also warn our people from irretrievable blunder.”

Manilal Gandhi, writing editorially in the *Indian Opinion*, recognised that if, after having embarked on passive resistance, Indians retraced their steps, they would suffer more humiliations than less and thought that it was that fear which impelled Sastri to advise against it. In his bitterness, Manilal discounted the services of the Indian Agents, starting from Sastri, and wished that they resigned office and returned to India when they failed to persuade the South African Government to reverse its anti-Indian policy and denounced South Africa to the world. In unfathomable anguish he said: “A self-respecting people will much rather suffer to be kicked out like men than merely

<sup>7</sup> *Servant of India*, May 5, 1932, p. 148.

suffer to be treated like serfs.”<sup>8</sup> His desperate advice was more heroic than practical. Sastri's fear was unfortunately realised.

The status of Indians in South Africa steadily grew worse as the years rolled by, as nothing came out of the colonisation idea and Assisted Emigration tapered off and the number of Indians increased. The anti-Indians pressed increasingly for country-wide segregation and the formal termination of the Cape Town Agreement and the Indian Agency in South Africa. Indians in South Africa contemplated passive resistance in 1939 but were persuaded to drop it by Mahatma Gandhi, even as Sastri had advised earlier. They proposed that the Government of India should retaliate against South Africa and apply trade sanctions. The demand for retaliation was taken up in India vigorously, and, in consequence, the Indian Legislature enacted the Reciprocity Act in 1943 and applied it soon after. Swami Bhavani Dayal and Mr. M. A. Jadwat, of the South African Indian Congress, and Dr. Lanka Sundaram, author of *Indian Overseas*, advocated a “blow for blow” policy and said: “Trade and economic sanctions are the best and the surest measures which India can adopt to bring South Africa to her knees.”<sup>9</sup> Sastri was opposed to retaliation, if only because they were bound to be ineffective and would make matters worse.

The Government of India was, however, persuaded by pressure of public opinion in India to apply trade sanctions and finally recall the Indian Agent. Swami Bhavani Dayal, who anticipated that trade sanctions would bring South Africa to her knees and redress Indian disabilities in that country, regretted his advice not long after and appealed to the Government of India to lift the sanctions as they were hurting the Indians in South Africa rather than the whites; the oppressed rather than the oppressors. As long after as 1957, the *Indian Opinion* deplored retaliation against innocent South African whites! It said that such action betrayed small-mindedness, unworthy of the India which produced Mahatma Gandhi; further, it was ineffective; it could be justified only as a prelude to war. It pleaded that Nehru would lose nothing if he did not seek to excel South Africa in humiliating individual South Afri-

<sup>8</sup> *Indian Opinion*, September 9, 1932, p. 271.

<sup>9</sup> *Economic Sanctions against South Africa*, 1944, p. 6.



cans, some of whom might be champions of race equality. In this connection, it is perhaps worth while to recall an incident of retaliation, the unfortunate victim of which was the Rev. W. Satchell, a South African white. On his arrival in Bombay to join the Christa Seva Sangh in Poona, he was held by the Police as a prohibited immigrant until he was rescued by his host, the Bishop of Bombay, who reached the ship too late to receive his guest on the boat. It was subsequently discovered that Satchell had so far identified himself with the Indian cause in South Africa that he too joined the passive resistance campaign and suffered jail! Satchell himself denied that he was subjected to any indignity by the Indian Police and that, in any event, it was nothing compared to the real indignities inflicted on Indians in South Africa and refused to complain. When they were told about the incident, Sastri and Gandhi felt deeply hurt, and the Government of India expressed regret.

Sastri watched from India the growing deterioration of the status of Indians in South Africa with sorrow, disappointment and indignation. As early as 1924, he had advocated that the matter should be referred to the League of Nations.<sup>10</sup> The Government of India referred it to the United Nations in 1946, at which Smuts defended South Africa. Practically on his death-bed, Sastri burst out with a vehemence unusual to him:

"I cannot but think that this fact should be made known to the United Nations in its hellish character and their intervention invoked in all solemnity. The Field Marshal [Smuts] and his sonorous hypocrisy should be exposed to the gaze of all honest men, and that section of the British people, who have made themselves responsible for this outrage on all that is redeeming in human character, must be disowned lock, stock and barrel, not only by the inhabitants of the British Isles but by all that is progressive and upward-looking in the world."

<sup>10</sup> *Servant of India*, April 10, 1924, p. 113.

### *THIRD ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE*

ON the conclusion of the Second Round Table Conference in Cape Town between India and South Africa, Sastri returned to India on February 27, 1932, and went to Delhi along with the Indian Delegation to report to the Government of India. No sooner had he returned to his home in Madras than he was summoned again to Delhi by the Viceroy in connection with the Agreement with South Africa. He returned to Madras and stayed there for some weeks and then visited Bangalore, Trichinopoly, Coimbatore and other places, speaking on South Africa as well as the political situation in India.

Early in 1932, the British Government appointed several committees in England and in India to work out details of its policy for Indian political reform as declared at the end of the Second Indian Round Table Conference in London on December 1, 1931. Powerful influences in India and Britain were, however, bent on postponing, indefinitely if possible, the implementation of the Federation at the centre and on hastening provincial autonomy in British India. Sastri joined other nationalists in disapproving of the move. Those who approved of an interval between provincial autonomy and central responsibility on a federal basis did not wish the second step. The difficulties in shaping the Federation were exaggerated in the interest of reaction. To delay was to deny. He earnestly entreated the Muslims in pressing their claims not to block, intentionally or unintentionally, the country's advance. Excessive eagerness for one step necessarily weakened the cause of the other. Instead of proving British good faith, the hastening of provincial autonomy would engender profound suspicion and stimulate

the forces of disorder. He reminded the Princes that at their instance British Indians had agreed to a Federation of All India in the place of reform in British India only. By undue hesitancy, by proposals to attenuate the federal tie and by demands which British India could not accept, they only strengthened the elements of obstruction in India and in England. Remembering that the failure of Federation would involve both British India and the States in an inevitable disaster, he implored them in the name of peaceful progress to continue and complete the good work they began in 1930 by introducing a comprehensive idea of Federation. He supported the suggestion that the British Indian Provinces, after they achieved autonomy, should not be permitted to veto Federation.

The Conservative Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Hoare, took another reactionary step when he proposed to dispense with the Conference method and rely on committees of experts and of the British Parliament. Sastri vigorously protested.

The change in the policy of the British Government dominated by the Conservative imperialists humiliated the Indian Liberals and cooperators so grievously that they resolved on non-cooperation with the consultative and other committees, appointed by Government! Sastri balanced the relevant considerations and backed the boycott. Though the Liberals were realists enough to get the best terms they could for their country by cooperation and were oppressed by the probability of a combination, open and avowed, of the Minorities and the British, with the attendant risks and acute communal warfare, he could not blind himself to the fact that, even if there were a possibility of effective service, it was blocked by the humiliating conditions. The authorities, who changed procedure and certainly meant to change policy, must have made up their minds that they could do without the help of persons who, while carefully disavowing the methods of the Congress, were always supporting the main part of its aims and pleading for its being conciliated and brought back to the counsels of Government. The proceedings of the Round Table Conference in its last days produced the suspicion that the India Office might feel relieved if its dubious allies dropped out and left it with those "friends" with whom it could not break and who would not break with it. It was difficult in

such conditions to offer cooperation. And when Sapru and Jayakar, with whom the Liberal Party had collaborated fully, found themselves reduced to impotence and despair, only one course was open to the Liberals. Sastri was the first signatory to the Cooperators' Manifesto announcing their non-cooperation! It said:

"We consider that the new procedure, announced by the Secretary of State for India on the 27th June, is so grave a departure from the Round Table Conference method as to be unacceptable. It does away with the ideas of *equality* during discussion between British and Indian delegates, and *agreement* between them as the basis of the proposals to be laid before Parliament. . . . In the circumstances we are clearly of the opinion that the best interests of the country require that those of our countrymen who may be invited to assist in the further stages of constitution-making should withhold cooperation unless and until the former method is restored"<sup>1</sup>

The Manifesto was signed by a great many leaders of all-India reputation and reputation for cooperation. As a result of it, the British Government modified its decision and restored the Conference procedure to some extent but reduced the number of invitees to it on the ground that a small group would be more efficient and expeditious!

In concluding the Second Round Table Conference, Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald mentioned that the British Government would suggest a tentative solution to the Minorities problem, as the Conference did not reach an agreed one. Accordingly, he announced on August 17, 1932, his scheme which came to be called the "Communal Award"! It was more or less on the lines of the Lucknow Pact of 1916, the only agreed arrangement between Hindus and Muslims. It contained two new items: women were given some reserved seats in the legislatures, to be elected by women only, and the Depressed Classes were for the first time distinguished from the Hindus and treated as a Minority community. The Award was temporary and provisional; it could be varied before enactment by agreement in India and after enactment at the end of ten years.

The Award was a bitter disappointment to the nationalists, including the Liberals, in India; it struck the deadliest

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, August 11, 1932, p. 287.

blow to the growth of Indian nationalism. It undid the achievement of the British in India. It forced separate electorates on women and Indian Christians, who had denounced them. The Depressed Classes were to vote in the general as well as in communal constituencies, with reserved seats. Sastri was not less disappointed than any nationalist but would not reject the Award. He said: "An adverse criticism of the Communal Award is easy and would in several aspects be deserved, but it ill becomes those, who by their failure cast odious duty on the Government, to take up a censorious attitude. Seeing that the door is not closed yet on an agreement of the communities and that in any event the Award is subject to alteration at the end of a period, those who value peace must accept the Award with as much grace as possible. The big constitutional issues to follow will tax all our wisdom. Let us await that supreme test."

The day after the Award was published Mahatma Gandhi, who was behind the prison bars, announced that he would "fast unto death" if the provision of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes was not withdrawn. His main argument was that such electoral segregation would perpetuate social segregation and prevent assimilation, as desired by the social reformers. Muslims and Christians might remain Muslims and Christians for all time and be proud of it. But Depressed Classes might not remain Depressed Classes for all time and be proud of it. During the Second Round Table Conference, the Mahatma had said that he would resist political segregation of the Depressed Classes with his life. He had meant it literally. He must now redeem his promise. He was not satisfied that the Depressed Classes would under the Award vote with the Hindus in the general constituencies on a common electoral roll and thereby maintain their unity with the Hindus and that the reservation on a separate roll was only supplementary and that in any event the arrangement was temporary.

After giving ample notice to the Government, the Mahatma commenced his fast on September 20, 1932, in the prison. While many people felt that the fast was unjustified, everybody felt that the Mahatma must be saved from self-immolation, and to that end something to satisfy him had to be done and done at breakneck speed. Hectic negotiation between the leaders of Caste Hindus and De-

pressed Classes resulted in the Poona Pact on September 24, which satisfied the Mahatma. On its acceptance by the British Government, he broke his fast on September 25, to the immense relief of millions of people all over the world. In his reply to the Address presented by the Coimbatore Municipality on September 22, his birthday, Sastri referred to the Mahatma's fast in Poona.

"In these days of anxiety no proceeding, whether public or private, may be begun without the hearts of all who are engaged therein turning towards what is happening within the walls of the Central Prison at Yerwada. . . . We follow with trepidation, and after the morning news in the papers, with some hope, what is going on amongst the leaders of India assembled near Poona. It is a great relief and satisfaction to know that the messages received are full of hope."<sup>2</sup>

On hearing the news that the Mahatma had broken his fast, Sastri sent the following telegram: "Million homes rejoice and bless your superb service, performed in your superb style. I confess I trembled in doubt, but the result vindicates and establishes you indisputably the foremost 'Untouchable' and 'Unapproachable'."

While the Poona Pact brought about a mighty upheaval of public opinion in favour of the uplift of the Depressed Classes, it was, in its political aspect, worse than the Communal Award of the Government. Most people had second thoughts about the Pact, once the Mahatma's life was saved. In a private letter, dated October 3, 1932, Sastri said:

"India breathes freely again. The Mahatma has ended his dreadful penance. In our joy we call it a miracle. But soon perspective will return to our vision, and we shall begin to perceive that our gains are dubious. Some people will even call it a mad bargain, somewhat like Moses and his spectacles in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Also, the Mahatma will find he has shot his bolt. The tension of feeling in the ten days of his fast has been so severe people won't submit to it another time. Even once was possible only in this superstitious country. For the moment, however, the feeling of relief is extraordinary. One first class dispute is also put out of the way."

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, September 29, 1932, p. 365.

The Third Round Table Conference in London lasted from November 17 to December 24, 1932. None of the major Princes attended it. The British Labour Party boycotted it. Of course, the Indian National Congress was not there. The results of the Conference were published by the British Government in a White Paper, which was submitted to a Joint Select Committee of Parliament, assisted by an auxiliary committee of some representatives of the Princes and the British Indians in a consultative capacity.

Sastri was not invited to the Third Round Table Conference or the subsequent Auxiliary Committee as a member or a witness. He was sorely disappointed. In a personal letter to an intimate friend he wrote on May 1, 1932:

"Once more I am disappointed. They don't want me, these Tories. I fear my dream is utterly shattered. . . . I am not to be on the Committee, or witness before it. Is that not a sorry finale to my career? But I am not to blame; my conscience is clear. Political vicissitudes can't be helped."

The official reason for dropping Sastri was his poor health. The Secretary of State for India communicated, through the Viceroy, that he was so concerned about Sastri's unsatisfactory health that he did not wish to trouble him! The Viceroy added sweet words of consolation and offered Sastri the Presidentship of the Council of State and pressed him to accept it as he wished to have at hand one whom he knew well and for long and whom he trusted. While thanking the Viceroy, Sastri respectfully declined the offer, as acceptance would cut him away from the political life of the country. Sastri suspected that the real reason for excluding him and his like was to sabotage Federation. That was apparent from the selection of the Princes; it included only those who had no faith in Federation.

The *Spectator* of London was critical of the exclusion. Its Editor said:

"For what inscrutable reason, I should like to know, has the name of Mr. Srinivasa Sastri been omitted from the list of Indians invited to cooperate with the Select Committee of the two Houses on Indian Reform. Fourteen years ago I asked Edwin Montagu—just when he was drafting the Bill on his proposals—what Indian public man he regarded the ablest and

most effective cooperator with this country. 'Sastri,' he replied without a moment's hesitation, and despite the tensions and frictions of the last half-a-dozen years, I would make bold to say that there is no man in all India whose counsel and cooperation the Select Committee should seek with greater advantage. An article by his pen in the recent issue of his paper, *The Servant of India*, on the White Paper shows how candid and at the same time how temperate his criticism is. Mr. Sastri was not invited to the Third Round Table Conference ostensibly on the grounds of his health, and the same excuse presumably does service still. I have reason to know that, so far from being too ill to come, Mr. Sastri has been assiduously and successfully—husbanding his strength to enable him to discharge what might have been the crowning task of his long career of public service. It is both foolish and unjust to disregard him."<sup>a</sup>

The Madras Corporation, as mentioned already, presented an address to Sastri, along with Sir K. V. Reddy, on April 26, 1932. The then Mayor, who was an admirer of Sastri, felt that the Corporation, dominated by the anti-Brahmin majority, would not agree if Sastri, a Brahmin, was singled out for the honour. So he coupled him with Sir K. V. Reddy, a non-Brahmin, who succeeded Sastri as Agent of India in South Africa and had just returned to India.

The Madras University conferred on Sastri, along with eleven others, on August 3, 1932, the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws. He was, however, too ill to speak on the occasion. In a humorous letter to a lady-friend, Sastri said: "Beware how you address me hereafter! . . . The only fly in the ointment is the expensive robe one has to buy. . . . Like the Society Lady's wedding dress, it has no use beyond that occasion. If you can make something of the material, please apply promptly!"

Considered in some competent quarters as even a greater distinction than the University honour was the "unanimous invitation" to Sastri to become a member of the Cosmopolitan Club of Madras, a quality club of Indians. Even normal admissions by application had become difficult because the Brahmin and non-Brahmin members in it "black-balled" applicants of the other community! Sastri never applied. He had, however, the unique honour of being

<sup>a</sup> *Servant of India*, May 11, 1933, p. 221.



“invited” to join and by a unanimous vote! Writing to a young friend, Sastri said: “In the history of the Cosmopolitan, no man has till now been ‘invited’ to join it! Don’t despise me any more! I have made good!”

## LECTURES ON GOKHALE

GOKHALE intended to write the biography of *his* Master, Ranade, and promised that if love, reverence and gratitude could accomplish the task, he would do it. But he did not. Sastri intended to write the biography of *his* Master, Gokhale, and he too did not, partly because of other and immediate tasks, and partly because of ill health which discouraged him from facing the heavy and sustained strain. He collected over the years the necessary and available material and classified it but yielded to the temptation to postpone the task.

Almost every year, on the anniversary of the passing away of Gokhale, Sastri made a speech on some aspect of Gokhale's life and work. Some of his intimate friends in Bangalore were keen that he should somehow be persuaded to do something more than an annual lecture, if less than a standard biography. So, without his knowledge, they hatched a plot, as it were, and moved the Mysore University to invite him to deliver University Extension Lectures on Gokhale. That fixed him. He had not the heart to say no, whatever his heart might do. And so it came to be that he gave three lectures in Bangalore and three in Mysore in January, 1935.

Commenting on Gokhale's failure to write the life of Ranade and his own failure to write the biography of Gokhale, he said: "Well, perhaps you expect me to say why. I have been wiser than Mr. Gokhale in my time. I never undertook seriously to write his life. But there has been a general expectation, and I have been blamed in some quarters for not performing this most necessary duty. I plead guilty. And may I say that the lectures that I now

deliver here may, God willing, form the foundation, if not a full-blown biography, at least the foundation for another course of extended Extension Lectures where I may treat adequately the life and career of Gokhale."<sup>1</sup> The expectation did not materialise.

In the course of his lectures Sastri touched on some of the highlights of Gokhale's life, such as his early life of poverty and struggle for education, work in the Fergusson College, pupillage under Ranade and G. V. Joshi, differences with Tilak, evidence before the Welby Commission on Indian Finance, apology in connection with the Poona plague relief operations, the Servants of India Society, the Indian Press Act, the Morley-Minto Constitution, the Hindu-Muslim problem, compulsory primary education, the South African Indian question, the Congress compromise controversy, and his last political testament written in his own hand a couple of days before his death. He corrected several misconceptions about Gokhale. The Lectures were subsequently published by the Mysore University.

Though Gokhale was just three years senior to him by age, Sastri's attitude towards him was one of reverence as to a *Guru*. But that did not prevent him from differing from Gokhale when he thought fit. An occasion arose soon after Sastri joined the Servants of India Society in 1907. Gokhale had been accused by his opponents in India as having been responsible for the prosecution and conviction of Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1908. Gokhale, who was in England at the time, received fairly full reports of the trial from Sastri who attended it in Bombay. In his letters to the Servants of India Society, Poona, Gokhale said that the prosecution was a "fearful mistake" and the sentence "shocking" and undertook to do his very best in the matter through personal representations to the authorities in England and in India and without publicity in the press. But his enemies carried on a vile campaign against him. Finally, Gokhale decided to prosecute two periodicals for defamation. Sastri advised against it in his letter of October 12, 1908, to a colleague in Poona.

"I cannot say that I have read with satisfaction [Gokhale's] decision to prosecute the defaming papers. The libel is outrageous. . . . Mr. Gokhale has borne so much, more perhaps than

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, p. 42.

I know. Shall he not bear this too? Does his good name need to be buttressed by the judgment of a law court? . . . Gokhale's favourite saying is that public life in India has more penalties than rewards; and I should like to think that the most malignant personal attacks were not sufficient to exhaust his patience. I remember once his saying to me that he had taken a vow never to lift his hand against a brother-Indian. Perhaps I gave it a more unqualified form than he gave it. But I was struck by its magnificent courage and the profound, if unconscious, self-confidence that it betokened in one familiar with the depressing conditions of Indian public life. That the hand is lifted only in self-defence and for the protection of larger interests is a consideration that gives me pause. Still, after making every allowance for it, I cannot help wishing that the rule had been observed in this instance also. I have thought it my duty to speak out my mind on such an occasion. Certainly, it can do no harm to anybody but myself. If you agree at all with me, please convey our opinion to Mr. Gokhale. It may annoy him. But would he not be even more displeased if he knew that we felt so differently on an important matter and did not deal candidly with him?"<sup>2</sup>

Sastri recalled how he too suffered similarly. For instance, he was accused of being responsible for the internment of Mrs. Annie Besant and her colleagues during the First World War. He took no action against his traducers. He had the satisfaction that Mrs. Besant herself never believed the story and the relations between the two were not soured by it.

He drew pointed attention to Gokhale's view that the moral authority of the Government of the day was of superlative importance to the stability of the country on which, in turn, depended peaceful progress. Gokhale had said that he would not defeat the Government, even if it were possible for him to do so. He had advised the members of the Servants of India Society in 1908 to remember that, whatever be the shortcomings of the British Government and however intolerable at times the insolence of individual Englishmen, they alone stood for order in the country at the time and that without that order no progress was possible. It was not difficult, he proceeded, to create disorder in our country; it had been our portion for centuries. But it was difficult to substitute another form of order. It was for

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, p. 31.

that reason that Gokhale, along with Ranade, Joshi and Pherozechah Mehta, held that the British connection with India was not the work of a punishing God but of a wise and benign Providence, which he would consider sacred and preserve for as long as he could foresee. To the question as to what Gokhale would do if he were alive in 1935, Sastri answered that he would seek by constitutional agitation Dominion Status within the Commonwealth and not Independence outside of it. Gokhale was asked in Madras in 1904 if any subject-country had attained freedom by constitutional means. "Maybe, no country has done so," said Gokhale, "but why not India do so for the first time and start a precedent in history? The history of the world is not at an end. Many chapters have yet to be added to it, and India and England, acting together for the consummation and fruition of India's destiny, may yet write a bright and lustrous chapter."

When Mahatma Gandhi himself doubted if any country had attained freedom by constitutional means, Sastri commented:

"Is this the time, when the National Congress itself has by universal consent returned to the constitutional method of political strategy, is this the moment for Gandhi, who has actively blessed this return to constitutional methods and not merely passively acquiesced in it, is this the moment for him to put this question? And then, is it right, I ask, for the progenitor for the first time in the history of the political world, as he says, of a new method of peaceful political warfare, possibly bloodless and quite legitimate and honourable, is it for him to demand that the verdict of history should be sought?"<sup>3</sup>

In concluding his lectures, Sastri marvelled that he was able to stand the exertion and the strain of the task and thought that its very sacredness enabled him to do so. In a letter, written from Bangalore on January 24, 1935, he said:

"Here I have just finished a trilogy on Gokhale. I spoke for an hour and a half each day to an audience which was 3,000 the first day, 4,000 the second and 5,000 the third. The attention I commanded was so profound, I felt flattered and proud. I had

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, p. 121.

no notes. The Vice-Chancellor was struck dumb with astonishment and read a three minutes' praise of me, calling my performance a *tour de force*. To me the greatest wonder was that I felt neither pain nor exhaustion. I felt and said I was performing a sacred duty like a parent's obsequies and was therefore immune from disease or infirmity."

Parallelism between Gokhale and Sastri is indeed very striking. Both were born poor; both were teachers turned statesmen; both played a conspicuous part in the evolution of the Indian Constitution and in the legislatures of India, provincial and central; both made several political visits to England; both took a hand in the South African Indian question; both suffered from bitter and unfair attacks from a section of Indians and were sometimes discounted by the British Government; both stood for constitutional methods of political agitation and Dominion Status within the Commonwealth; both admired the Mahatma personally and differed from him politically; and both failed to write the biographies of their *Gurus*. Both did some of their best public work struggling against chronic ill health. What Gokhale was to Morley, Sastri was to Montagu. Sastri, however, had a wider arena than Gokhale in that he visited not only Britain and South Africa but also the Dominions to plead for full political rights for Indians settled in them. He went to Geneva for the League of Nations and to Washington for the Limitation of Armaments Conference. While Dominion Status was a distant goal to Gokhale, it was the immediate objective of Sastri. There was another parallelism between the two: both died as widowers.

Sastri was very fond of, and devoted to, his wife, Srimati Lakshmi Ammal, to whom reference has been made in another chapter already. Generally, she accompanied him in his tours in India and attended on her ailing husband with selfless devotion and solicitude, until her own health became worse than his, early in 1934. Diagnosed first as pleurisy, her disease was later discovered to be tuberculosis of the lungs. After a prolonged and painful illness of over six months, she passed away on June 16, 1934. A few weeks before the tragic event, Sastri was in a "terrible state of anxiety" and bore testimony to her angelic patience and cheerfulness and her brave struggle to keep back her tears.

\* *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 341.

Soon after the event, he said, "I do the same things more or less at the same times in the same style. I fear, however, that my inside may not long continue the same." Writing on June 24, 1934, to me as I was going abroad for a year, he said: "Only I must be alive when you return. It is by no means to be taken for granted." In Mrs. Sastri's death, Sastri lost his anchorage. In his letter of June 21, 1934, to Mr. A. Krishnaswami Aiyar, a very dear friend of both, Sastri paid a well-deserved tribute to both and more particularly to his wife: "Funny little problems arise caused by her not being with us. With strange folly, I say every time she would solve this in a trice! Yes, between her and you there was an unavowed bond of sympathy and regard. I watched it with pride and complete satisfaction. 'What does the *old one* say?' she would ask with the affection and trust with which she would ask an oracle. She bore no grudges; she did no harm. So far as I could see, my relations cherished her and my friends honoured her. In matters that came within her range, her instinct was sound and her judgment trustworthy. Her daughter and her grandchildren she loved with a measureless love; for me she had a feeling as for a god. Often she taught me to be just and forgiving. Hard as it may be to believe, she guarded my good name as her own and kept me from thoughts and deeds that might have injured it. Well, she was too good and too noble for me. Now and hereafter, I hope her memory will keep me straight."<sup>5</sup>

Sastri's bereavement evoked much sympathy, love and affection even beyond his immediate family circle. Mr. R. Suryanarayana Rao, who was a member of the Servants of India Society at the time, and his wife, Mrs. Anasuyabai, were among those who were drawn to him in unsurpassed love and service. Mrs. Anasuyabai gave Sastri intellectual companionship, nursing care and filial love in abundance for nearly ten years and more particularly during his last illness. She watched over him as his guardian angel. She published his lectures on Sir Pherozeshah Mehta in 1945.

As has been said above, Sastri did not return to the task of writing a fuller biography of Gokhale. He regretted that no member of the Servants of India Society, who learnt public life at his feet, attempted it either. Two Indians, who were not members of the Society, offered to write

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 335.

Gokhale's life under certain conditions, which were, however, unacceptable to Sastri. Surprisingly enough, two short biographies were written by foreigners! One, by Rev. John S. Hoyland, was published in 1933 by the Y.M.C.A. in its *Builders of Modern India* Series. The other by Mr. and Mrs. H. G. D. Turnbull was published in 1934, and Sastri contributed an appreciative Foreword to it.

Sastri toured the then Central Provinces and Berar in February and March, 1935, and addressed several meetings and received Municipal Addresses and other marks of public appreciation. On March 3, 1935, he opened the Gokhale Memorial Library in Nagpur and spoke on "Learning and Leadership." Gokhale, he said, had insisted that patriotism and public spirit were not enough for leadership, for the mistakes of well-intentioned people did as much harm and mischief as those of ill-intentioned ones. The past should be studied in order to build the future well. Accumulation of knowledge was not enough; it should be assimilated and should inform one's thoughts and actions. He discounted the then current idea that the wise man should scorn books and trust to nature. The former should be the foundation for the latter. He recalled how his mother, who never knew the inside of a book, often helped her very learned husband when he was struggling for the name of a hero or an incident in the sacred lore of India. She had heard the stories narrated and was able to preserve a faithful record of them in her memory. But, he averred, if she had scholastic training, she would have been far more useful. Whatever might have been the case in the beginning of history when unlettered men and women did heroic things, it was inconceivable after centuries of history for anybody to serve humanity efficiently, who did not know its past and know it well.

"Can a Politician be a Gentleman?" was the subject of Sastri's discourse to the Nagpur University Union, which in its Address complimented him on being both and on his habit of seeing the other man's point of view. Though it was sometimes accounted as a weakness in him, Sastri urged that the cross-bench mind was not a disabling handicap, though some people thought that "to show tenderness or chivalry to the opponent is but another name for weakness, for tepidity of conviction on your part, for failure to serve your party as a partisan should serve it." There was some



truth in it, but there was more of it in the other proposition that, where sharp differences divided parties, the impartial man would deliver his verdict only after hearing both sides. Politics in India was not yet a profession and he hoped that it would never be, though the prospect seemed unfavourable. Politics was ideal when public interest prevailed over personal and party interests but degraded otherwise. Often it was the latter. In politics it was common for men to differ honestly. Their views might be questioned, but not their personal character. It was gentlemanly, noble and human in the best sense of the word to believe well of a person as long as possible. He recalled how a British aristocratic lady refused to visit Wales because it gave birth to David Lloyd George who had sponsored the Unemployment Insurance Act, which she disapproved! A very devoted friend of Sastri, who was not permitted by the Congress authorities to attend a dinner at which he was the chief guest, called on him at dead of night, unbeknown to the Congress people! The right attitude towards the Opposition, Sastri pleaded, was to look upon it as a corrective, as a supplementary, as deserving of honourable recognition. The Leader of the Opposition in Parliamentary Democracy was recognised as not less of a servant of the public than the Prime Minister and was paid an almost equal salary. Politicians could and should be gentlemen, though some fell below the standard.

The Deccan Education Society and the Fergusson College, Poona, celebrated their Golden Jubilee in 1935. Gokhale was the most outstanding leader of the institutions for nearly two decades. On retiring from them in 1905, he founded the Servants of India Society on a hill-top. He took the Vows of the Society first and then administered them to his colleagues, the Foundation-Members. As part of their Jubilee Celebrations, the authorities of the Fergusson College decided to erect a tablet to commemorate the founding of the Servants of India Society on the hill-top and invited Sastri to perform the unveiling ceremony on April 20, 1935. As Sastri could not climb the hill, the ceremony was performed at the foot of it with a replica of the tablet. Sastri mentioned that the idea of the tablet was not mooted by any of the Foundation-Members then living but by himself who was not one of them. In the course of his speech, he emphasised that the Society and the

Fergusson College were not organically connected; there was no common membership. The College, which was an educational institution receiving grants from Government, should not suffer by being mixed up with the Society which was a political body precluded from accepting Government grants and which was often viewed with suspicion by the Government for its political activities.

Gokhale had given the Society an idea and an ideal. "The idea was that Indians in those days, much more so in these days, could combine together for purely secular purposes and apply to the achievement of these purposes the devotion and self-sacrifice which are usually consecrated only in the service of religion. The ideal was the ideal of self-help."<sup>6</sup> In these two respects the Society carried a step forward the idea and the ideal of the Fergusson College, of which it might be said to be a lineal descendant. "If it be true that a father delights to be excelled by his son, may I ask the Professors of the Fergusson College and the Managing Body to look upon us with a kindly eye and to throw round us . . . that mantle of paternal care and paternal pride which it was such a joy to receive this morning."<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on the spot chosen by Gokhale to found the Society, Sastri said:

"While there was no human being round about, could there have been, I ask, a more appropriate spot upon which to take vows of a deep and abiding nature, vows that are calculated to change your whole life and your whole outlook, vows the faithful observance of which may transform you altogether, effect radical changes in your character, in your conduct, in your attitude towards your fellow-beings and towards your Creator? Yes, an open spot, high above the rest, with the sky and the air to witness, in the midst of the elements, certainly was the most appropriate spot upon which to enrol the first members under the consecration of the serious vows."<sup>8</sup>

The strain and excitement of the ceremony was so great that Sastri had a severe heart-attack and was laid up in Poona for some weeks under examination by heart specialists. Gradually he recovered and was fit enough to travel to Madras. His health was still so delicate that reassuring telegrams were despatched *en route* and soon after his

<sup>6</sup> *My Master Gokhale*, p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

arrival in Madras and subsequently in Tiruppur.

In the course of his annual Gokhale Day speech on February 19, 1937, in Madras, Sastri referred to the eminent people, Indian and British, who influenced Gokhale. They included Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Professor Agarkar, Mahadev Govind Ranade, G. V. Joshi, V. Krishnaswami Aiyar and Professor M. Rangachari of Madras, Principal Selby of the Deccan College, Poona, and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. Selby was responsible for softening the severe discipline which Gokhale had intended for the members of the Servants of India Society. Pherozeshah Mehta, on the other hand, disapproved of the sacrifices demanded of the members of the Society who were likely to consider themselves superior and select and give themselves airs.

In November, 1935, Gopal Krishna Devadhar, who succeeded Sastri as the President of the Servants of India Society in 1927, suddenly passed away. He was one of the Foundation-Members of the Society. In a tribute to him, Sastri said that Devadhar's death was a shattering blow to the Society and as dire an occasion for mourning as Gokhale's death in 1915. Devadhar's special forte was Co-operation, relief of distress and women's uplift. Work was his religion; the doing of good was his very nature. He did not take active part in politics. From movements which tended to disturb peace and order he turned away in something like horror.

## CONSTITUTION OF 1935

By December, 1932, the outlines of the proposed Federal Constitution were fairly clear. Sastri subjected them to a searching analysis. His main criterion was the extent of the transfer of power from London to Delhi. The new Constitution, he said, must contain "as few subtractions as possible from Dominion Status. Every reservation or safeguard is such a subtraction." If Indians were asked to trust the British to use the safeguards with "commonsense and goodwill," the British might also trust the Indians to act with similar commonsense and goodwill. He was opposed to the exercise of safeguards and reservations by an external authority. He said:

"A safeguard is an arrangement by which the precipitate or unwise action of one arm of the Government may be corrected by the action of another arm, or by the requirement that more than an ordinary majority would be necessary, or by a second affirmation after the lapse of a certain period. Expedients like these have the merit that they are strictly within the Constitution and do not look to an outside agency for their being put into operation. It would be necessary to institute an extra-constitutional safeguard only if it were made clear that a constitutional one was not feasible. . . . If these principles be borne in mind it is possible that the resulting constitution could be described as a close approximation to Dominion Status."<sup>1</sup>

He then proceeded to show that the proposed Constitution which reserved large powers to the Viceroy violated one or other of these principles and made an enormous inroad

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, December 15, 1932, p. 506.

into Dominion Status.

Sastri and those who agreed with him in his criticism of "safeguards" to be exercised by the British representative in India, were criticised by some other nationalists on the ground that they had acquiesced in much worse reservations in favour of the Princes who were to nominate the representatives of the States, and in communal electorates for the Minorities. But that was a short-sighted view. Both Sastri and the Mahatma took the view that once the British hegemony was eliminated, both Princely nominations and communal electorates stood a good chance of being eliminated. And that is what happened when India attained Independence and evolved her own Constitution.

The Indian members of the Third Round Table Conference in London were subjected to severe criticism even by some Liberals. Sastri defended them against such criticism. Not that he was satisfied with the results of the Conference. He was particularly critical of the demands of the Princes to induce them to join the Federation. "At the first session of the Round Table Conference, when the Princes offered of their own accord to join British India, they were acclaimed as saviours. The *daimios* of Japan could not have got more praise for their self-abnegation. St. James's Palace rang with our hallelujas. The hotels where the Princes stayed reeked with the incense that we burned. To use Lord Beaconsfield's words, we laid it on, not with the spoon, but with the trowel. Like the gods, whose kindred they are, they were greatly pleased, but unlike the gods, their boons are slow, puny, begrudged." He then described how puny and begrudged they were. "To begin with, they render the Dominionhood of India fundamentally defective by looking to the Crown for the maintenance of treaty rights and the exercise of paramountcy. Then they reduce the scope of federation until it is thin and anaemic, and many Indian politicians think it is not worth while. . . . They cannot tolerate a federal citizenship. They will not hear of fundamental rights. They will nominate their own agents to the legislature. . . . We have met them on most, if not all, of these demands. Yet, their utterances are full of the sacrifices they have made for the sake of Mother India." With the cross-bench mind, which has all along been his distinguishing characteristic, he made allowance for the difficulties of the Princes. "But it is no use getting vexed. They

have their own difficulties and some of these are great. By heredity and by training they abhor democracy and may well have vague fears from association with a big partner long used to the ways of democracy.... Still I pay glad homage to the statesmanship and high courage of many members of the Princely order. Mysore and Baroda, Bikaner and Bhopal have been steadfast in the cause of federation and are today fighting valiantly for it.... Through these we make one last appeal to the representatives of the ancient houses: 'Pray, don't hold up things any more, come in and earn undying glory'.<sup>2</sup>

Sastri presided over a public meeting in Madras in February, 1933, to consider the results of the Round Table Conference, and while frankly dissecting its defects and asking for improvements, made it clear that the Indian nationalist representatives at the Conference did not deserve to be censured; they had done their best, and it was not their fault that they did not succeed.

The British Government published a White Paper containing their concrete proposals for Indian constitutional reform, which raised a storm of protest since they were more reactionary than expected. Sastri submitted it to a searching and restrained analysis. The phrase "Dominion Status" was conspicuous by its absence; federation was held up; safeguards were inserted in "the common interests of India and Britain"; safeguards exclusively in the interest of Britain were inserted; the Government of India was weakened by the separation of the Viceroy and the Governor-General; and the subjects of the Indian States were left severely in the cold. He also criticised the Debate in the House of Commons on the White Paper and contrasted the promises of the erstwhile Labour Government with the performance of the Conservatives then in power. Lord Irwin, later Lord Halifax, the Conservative Viceroy under the Labour Government, had expressly used the phrases "Dominion Status" and "safeguards in the interests of India." The Conservatives avoided the use of the first and expanded the latter to include British interests. With bitter sarcasm, Sastri said: "True, too true, it was a Halifax who first let the fatal syllables (Dominion Status) profane his lips. But was he not then in the service of those enemies of the Empire, the blaspheming socialists?... It was the

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, February 9, 1933, p. 65.

Labour men that perpetrated the enormity!"

So many were the reactionary features in the White Paper that nationalist Indians preferred the *status quo ante* to the proposed reforms. Sastri thought that it was a doctrine of despair and pleaded that, though repulsed, Indians should make concerted attempts to better the reforms and, in any event, not boycott them. He appealed to Government to release Mahatma Gandhi who was then in prison and implored the Congress leaders to take their share in the reconstruction of Indian polity. "They must remember that in this sphere there is no standing still; if places are not filled by the right men, they will be filled by the wrong men; if things are not done well, they will be done badly; if the interests of the nation are neglected, those of the minorities and their allies will be consolidated; and every day lost will mean a year lost to our children with less and less chance of repair. Meanwhile, we must rally our forces, sadly demoralised by the White Paper and the Commons debate, and endeavour at the next stage to gain a hearing for our views."<sup>3</sup>

In April, 1933, Sastri attended the session of the Liberal Federation held in Calcutta to consider the White Paper and made, as usual, a weighty and constructive speech, advocating improvements in the scheme of reform. In June, he went to Poona and during his short stay there he met Mahatma Gandhi every day while the Conference called by the Congress was in Session and pleaded that Civil Disobedience should be dropped and Council Entry favoured. His appeal failed at the moment. Though the proceedings of the Congress Conference were sought to be kept secret, there was wholesale leakage, much to the satisfaction of the Government and discomfiture of the Congress. The Mahatma would not abandon Civil Disobedience, and as mass action was found to be impracticable, he would confine it to individuals like himself. The other Congress leaders were against Civil Disobedience, mass or individual, and in favour of entering the legislatures, but would not forgo the Mahatma's leadership. As a compromise, mass Civil Disobedience was not abandoned but suspended till August, 1933, when it was to be resumed if the Government did not come to terms with the Mahatma. The Viceroy unceremoniously and even insolently re-

<sup>3</sup> *Servant of India*, April 13, 1953, p. 172.

fused to meet the Mahatma unless Civil Disobedience was abandoned.

There were differences among the nationalists also. Some of them, including some members of the Servants of India Society, were in favour of "rejecting" the reforms, while Sastri and others favoured working them for what they were worth. There was no difference as to the unsatisfactory nature of the reforms, but there was as to the course of action to be adopted. In a letter dated November 9, 1933, to a colleague in the Servants of India Society, Sastri observed:

"This point of difference between us as to the desirability of allying ourselves with Churchill in order to get the Bill thrown out by the House of Commons is a very good illustration of the difference of mentality between people. I am clear that it is futile and that therefore we should not waste labour and thought on it but find some agreed item of work which may have little more promise. You and others are equally clear that, whether it proves futile or not, the mere effort is worth making. It is a question entirely of judgment.

"You are not just to me if you believe that I advocate inaction; I am keen on organising for Council entry, so that, with the best men in, the mischief of the communalists and special interest people may be countered as far as possible. The misgovernment of the next few years will be appalling, and everything that can be done must be done to mitigate it. The good men will be in a minority. I admit. But a minority may be a powerful check on the majority, if they are not dispirited or liable to be bought.

"Congressmen who are out of this programme are not eager to work with Liberals in this part of India. On your side the same contempt for Liberals is not manifested, but there may be other difficulties of which I am not aware.

"You cannot say that I have been reticent. My views have been clearly stated more than once. True, I haven't written in the *Servant of India*. But is it necessary that more than two members should use the Society's organ for mutual disputation? Kodanda Rao represents my side well enough."

The other view, namely, rejection, was presented by another Member of the Servants of India Society under the pen-name "Observer." Sastri commented:



"It is difficult to get me to use the word *reject*. I have a rooted dislike, since the days of the Montagu-Chelmsford Constitution, for the word. It is nothing, in my opinion, but an empty brag. The Constitution is certain to come. The Country cannot reject it. Then, those who use the war-cry must at least reject it, i.e., have nothing to do with it. Do you ask the Liberal Party to non-cooperate now? . . . Then you must not use a word that commits you to non-cooperation.

"But I am clear that the Liberal Party must cooperate. I have given the reason already. Kindly do not suspect me of any personal ambition."

Sastri continued his argument in a letter to another colleague.

"To complete my argument, I have to state why I consider it futile to get Parliament to throw out the Bill. Two considerations clinch the matter. The minorities and the special interests, inclusive of the Princes, are keen on the new changes. The party in power in Britain are anxious to frame a constitution which will maintain their hold by giving the domination in India to their natural allies, the conservatives. It may be said that even Sapru contemplates non-cooperation in case the constitution in the end is too bad. I am not sworn to follow Sapru. I think him wrong. . . . As for our representative capacities, Sapru confessedly cannot speak for anybody but himself. I represent a party, small and uninfluential, it is true. In my judgment that party must cooperate and will. Not for love of the Government or the constitution but to be a check on the communalists."<sup>4</sup>

The controversy continued between two sets of members of the Servants of India Society and Sastri returned to the subject in another letter to a colleague.

"Certainly, you understand my position. You do not approve of it. That is another matter. As to condemning the White Paper, I have done as much as any member of the Society who is not actually a journalist, and my condemnation is unreserved. . . . Kodanda Rao is, generally speaking, representative of my way of thinking. In a long argument, he and I must differ on some detailed steps. On certain points I agree more with 'Observer.' On the meaning of the word 'Reject' I believe you are

<sup>4</sup> *S.I.S. Weekly Letter*, November 16, 1933.

wrong. 'Condemn,' 'Loath,' 'Detest,' 'Execrate,' 'Abhor'—any word will do."

In a communication dated November 29, 1933, to a colleague in the Society, Sastri expressed pleasant surprise that the President of the Bengal Presidency Muslim League took a line similar to his, when he said that the constitution was rotten but to talk of rejection was moonshine and mentioned that the Muslims and the non-Brahmins of Madras were eager for the new régime.

Sastri participated in the annual session of the National Liberal Federation of India held in Madras in Christmas week of 1933. He declined to preside over an all-parties conference which was proposed by some Bombay Liberals on the ground that he had disqualified himself for the office by having committed himself to the view that there was no hope of securing improvements in the White Paper and that India had no choice but to work the new constitution. The proposed conference was dropped. In January, 1934, Sastri gave important lectures on the White Paper at the Ranade Hall, Madras, in which he reviewed it comprehensively and indicated the course of action which should be followed. At the outset, he denied Winston Churchill's allegation in the British House of Commons that Sastri had recommended the White Paper to Indians because of its several advantages, including the right of secession. "I never recommended the White Paper," affirmed Sastri and asked: "How could I?" Every forward step towards democracy was neutralised by two anti-democratic safeguards. He attached great significance to the deliberate omission of Dominion Status in the White Paper. He revealed its "secret history" as applied to India. When sympathetic British statesmen proposed to insert the phrase in constitutional documents, objection was raised by the other Dominions on the ground that India was not their equal in status. "India cannot wait," declared Sastri, "on the pleasure of the Dominions to acquire Dominion Status." In Britain, Lord Salisbury, who was very influential, had gone the length of saying that Britain was not bound to honour the pledge of Dominion Status because it was conditional, and the conditions were impracticable, and so it was more honourable to break it than to keep it. Lord Reading, the Liberal ex-Viceroy, supported it at the first session of the

Round Table Conference but evaded it when the Conservatives came to power. Lord Irwin, who had himself proclaimed the pledge when he was Viceroy under the Labour Government, also by-passed it later. "It grieves me beyond words," exclaimed Sastri, "to have to say that he too ran away from it." Even more heart-breaking was the change in the attitude of Ramsay Macdonald who, as Prime Minister in the Labour Government, authorised it but who, as the head of the National Government which was dominated by the Conservatives, shied away from it. In bitter humour, Sastri remarked that he behaved like his "constitutional sovereign"—as advised by his ministers! Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy, was alone in repeating the pledge of Dominion Status. He had, however, been warned by Sir Samuel Hoare, the Conservative Secretary of State for India, that it was inadvisable to do so as Dominion Status was a far-off dream. But he was permitted some indulgence and excused some escapades in view of his "success" in putting down the Congress and rectifying Lord Irwin's "mistakes"! When Lord Willingdon said that he expected in his own term of office to become a "constitutional" Viceroy, he was trounced for it by Churchill, and Sir Samuel mouthed that forbidden phrase for the sole purpose of explaining that Lord Willingdon did not mean it!

The Conservative Government spoke in two voices on the safeguards. When addressing Indians, they said that they would be invoked only in emergencies and would fall into desuetude in course of time when they might be formally repealed. When speaking to the Minorities and the British vested interests, they assured that the safeguards were meant to be used normally and not exceptionally! "The mere existence of these safeguards," observed Sastri, "is a menace to the growth of the Constitution."

Sastri had little doubt that the objective of the British Conservatives was to make progress towards Dominion Status under a future Labour Government extremely difficult, if not impossible. But as an optimist, he would not give up hope of better turns of fortune, if only the national spirit was kept alive, and not allowed to be swamped by the communalists. "I look forward to the time, it will not be long, when this blight will pass away from our land; the rains will fall; there will be green all round and the air will be once more fragrant with hope. When that day dawns, God

grant that the national spirit should be there so that our children and our children's children may reap a rich and sustaining harvest." But at the moment he saw no hope of the Constitution being improved in the national and democratic direction. He also saw no hope of Indians uniting to reject it. "The White Paper Constitution is coming. We have got to reconcile ourselves to it. It is impossible for us to reject it. We cannot get India to do so, for India is not united." He was opposed to non-cooperation. It was one thing to disobey a law considered immoral and incur the penalties, but it was quite a different matter when in cold blood the statute book of the land was ransacked to discover a law in order to break it just for the sake of breaking a law and going to jail. The two things were absolutely unlike.

It was pushing to "romantic lengths" the doctrine that every freeman had responsibility for every wrong done which he did not resist actively. "This is an unfortunate world," said Sastri, "where so many profound and widespread wrongs have thriven for long ages. If a man is to go to jail because there is some wrong around him, he can never come out of it." He continued, "In this world the only place where a man can call his soul his own is the jail. Once you go there you are divested of your responsibilities. Somebody else takes charge of you. . . . In other words, by getting into jail, by depriving yourself of your freedom, by putting yourself entirely under the authority and direction of other people, you cease morally to be responsible for the evils around you."

Sastri did not agree with this philosophy of running away from the befalling evil; he would stay and try to mitigate it. If a family was threatened by some catastrophe, should its head run away and seek his absolution elsewhere, or stay with it, bear the incidental hardships and privations, and, if possible, take more than his share of them and shield the members depending on him? In passionate and solemn tones, he exhorted:

"It is when trouble is acute, when the difficulties are greatest, that is to say, though it seems hard to say it, when the Constitution is the worst, it is then that the duty of the citizen to perform all his functions is most strong. If I realise my duty, it is just the time when I should not close my eyes, when I should

not fold my arms, and when I should not shut up my brain in inactivity. It is a challenge to whatever is best, most active and most efficient in me."

Sastri granted that Civil Disobedience had met with some success as long as Government met non-violence with non-violence, though even then the people suffered more than the Government. But when it was met with violence, it failed. He challenged: "If you can tell me something which will hit the Government without hitting the people far more, I shall be pleased. But nobody has devised such a remedy till now. And it will be a miracle of an argument which will persuade me to hit our people terribly in order that Government may be hit slightly." He acknowledged that such little success as Civil Disobedience achieved was due to the fact that the opponent was the British Government, which was slowest to use full force and quickest to abandon it.

Sastri's anticipations regarding India's attitude towards the White Paper Constitution came true in due course. Those who stood for its "rejection" started explaining that they did not mean to boycott it, nor seek to destroy it from within, but make the best use of it and prevent worse happening. There was a mighty shift of opinion in the Congress and the great majority of Congressmen preferred entering the Councils to boycotting them. Mahatma Gandhi retired from the Congress but gave his blessing to the co-operators so that they worked as part of the Congress and with the goodwill of the Mahatma. Sastri welcomed this new move towards constitutional cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

The Congress had taken an equivocal position regarding the Communal Award, which was really the decision of the British Government and not an award. It would neither accept nor reject the Award on merits and argued that since it rejected the White Paper, the Communal Award, which was part of it, was automatically rejected! Sastri discounted this plea. The new legislatures would be elected on the basis of the Award, and it was not possible to ignore it when entering the councils. He pointed out that the British Government had given several opportunities to Indians to settle their communal problem between themselves and stepped in only when they failed. "Indians had no right to

<sup>5</sup> *Servant of India*, May 17, 1934, p. 239.

quarrel with it," said Sastri, "it was a bitter pill, but they fully deserved it."

The Congress Parliamentary Party proposed to "reject" the new Constitution by voting against it in the legislatures and organise a Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution for India. Sastri discounted the proposal of constituent assembly as impracticable, considering that Indians could not compose their communal differences. The attempt would be a complete and ignominious failure.

It is interesting to recall that the idea of a Constituent Assembly had been mooted by Mr. V. K. Krishna Menon on behalf of the India League of London and had been supported by some of the most prominent leaders of the British Labour Party, including David Grenfell, M.P., Harold Laski, H. N. Brailsford, and above all, by George Lansbury. The last had said that the future constitution of India should be settled by Indians themselves as none made by Britain was likely to receive willing acceptance. "There was only one way out for a Socialist Government. They should summon, or ask Indians themselves to summon a Constituent Assembly and hand over to that Assembly the task of deciding the future Government of India."

Sastri was opposed to any appreciable interval between the inauguration of Provincial Autonomy and Federation under the White Paper plan because he feared that some of the autonomous provinces might delay or even defeat Federation and invoke the Constituent Assembly for the purpose.

The Indian National Congress met in Bombay in the last week of October, 1934. The session was significant in that the Mahatma retired from the Congress, that it formally dropped Civil Disobedience, reserving it to the Mahatma, that it changed its Constitution and sanctioned Council-entry. It was a major crisis for the Congress. The changes in the Congress Constitution were made at the instance of the Mahatma, though he himself left the organisation. Sastri criticised the changes. One of them was that the phrase "legitimate and peaceful" was replaced by "truthful and non-violent." It raised a storm of protest in the Congress itself, but the Mahatma's wish prevailed. This amendment laid on Congressmen, said Sastri, a moral obligation which few would be able to fulfil. "If each Congress-

man has to take a vow to be truthful and non-violent in thought, word and deed, we may have to establish confessionals in every street, and every one of us should assume the rôle of censor or a sort of sleepless constable prying not only on the deeds but also on the speech and thoughts of our neighbours." The Indian National Congress, remarked Sastri, was not a religious organisation meant for the purification of the character of its members but a political body. If a man was truthful and non-violent in thought, word and deed, he would be entitled to highest reverence. But it would be wrong to foist such standards on ordinary men, who, if they took the vow, would disobey it. "Such was the complexity of this world, such was the difficulty of the doctrine of truth psychologically and morally that it was a sober fact that every one of them made statements which were variations, half-variations, or fractional variations of the truth. Such doctrines would promote hypocrisy or the morbid consciousness of violating impossible vows. They would keep out of the Congress sincere patriots and make united action difficult."

The Congress Parliamentary Party said, among other things, that it would vote against the White Paper and insist on a Constituent Assembly based on adult franchise or as near it as possible. The Party would not, however, convene the Assembly and draw up a constitution, which was bound to be rejected by the Government. On the other hand, it would insist on the Government calling the Assembly, as it alone had the authority to do so, unless the people made a successful revolution, which the Party did not contemplate. The Party would miss no opportunity to render the maximum national service possible under the limitations of the Constitution and, in particular, secure the repeal of repressive laws. Constitutional cooperation could go no further!

The Party reiterated that it would neither accept nor reject the Communal Award, because the Muslims in general welcomed it and the Hindus and Sikhs rejected it. It hoped to secure an agreed solution when possible. As the White Paper was worse than the Award, the Party would concentrate on the "rejection" of the former. The Muslim Unity Board, representing all the Muslim organisations, said that it could not accept the White Paper because it did not provide for full autonomy for the provinces and

give residuary powers to them. It would not, however, allow any change in the Communal Award till such time as an agreed settlement was reached. The Hindu Mahasabha manifesto confined itself to the Communal Award and rejected it and insisted on the abolition of communal electorates and weightages. It also insisted that residuary powers should vest in the Federation and not in the provinces. When Sastri did not hesitate to give out his personal opinion, the Liberal Party merely repeated in August, 1934, what it had said in April, 1933: it disapproved the White Paper but did not indicate what to do about it.

It happens that during election campaigns, contestants decry their rivals, not always with justification. Sastri was roused to intervention when Bhulabhai Desai, the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, in his speech in Bombay on September 17, 1934, referred to a private conversation between him and Sastri in Coimbatore some weeks earlier on the implications of "constitutional" in political agitation and traduced the Liberals and Gokhale. Bhulabhai Desai said that the Liberals interpreted "constitutional" to mean cowardly selfishness and attributed it to Gokhale. Sastri indignantly repudiated the "cruel caricature" which was neither truthful nor non-violent, neither legitimate nor peaceful. Gokhale had defined constitutional agitation in unmistakable terms. It included appeals to justice at one end and passive resistance and non-payment of taxes at the other but excluded violent revolution or action independently of the Government of the day. At the same time, all that was constitutional was not expedient and wise.

In November, 1934, before the publication of the Report of the Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament on the White Paper, elections were ordered in India under the existing Constitution. It was clear by then that the Committee's Report would be more reactionary than the White Paper. It was suspected that Government wished the elections took place before the worst was confirmed and perhaps provoked a boycott. As soon as it was known that elections would take place, political parties accelerated their election campaigns.

In the general elections held in November, 1934, the Congress obtained large majorities. The Report of the Joint Select Committee was published on November 23, 1934, a few days after the elections. As anticipated, it proved to



be more reactionary and disappointing than the White Paper. The Bombay Liberals noted with profound disappointment that the Report, instead of removing the serious defects and shortcomings of the White Paper, had introduced further very undesirable features which tended seriously to make the responsible self-government that it professed to construct for India almost entirely illusory and asserted that the new constitution would not be acceptable to India and would, instead of allaying, intensify political discontent in the country. The Congress said that the Report was in several respects worse than the White Paper and resolved that it should be rejected.

At the annual session of the National Liberal Federation of India held in Poona in the Christmas week of 1934, Sastri moved the principal Resolution which said that the Report of the Select Committee was not wanted. In the course of his speech, he made it clear that "we wish with all our heart that we were let alone." But he recalled that Government had announced that the new constitution was workable and there were people willing to work it. He recalled how he had all along pleaded that Dominion Status and Federation should be achieved together and that the one should not be sacrificed for the other. He was disappointed that the Princes set more store on Federation and weakened Dominion Status. He implored the Princes to "guard themselves against the fate which might overwhelm them, the fate of those who are content to be used as blocks in the way of India's march towards her destiny. They may be safe today, but one day India will be fully aroused and competent to express herself and treat properly those that did not help but allowed themselves to be used as hindrances to her destiny." This was a grave warning to the Princes, as grave as Sastri's temperament permitted. The Liberals, said Sastri, might be "chronic cooperators," but the Government non-cooperated by rejecting every single suggestion they made and was not, therefore, entitled to their willing cooperation. "It is impossible for the Liberals," declared Sastri, "to give an atom of cooperation." But cooperate they must in the sense of performing a duty under difficulty and discouragement, lest worse befall.

Sapru was not surprised or hurt by the deliberate omission of Dominion Status by Government and suggested that

it was due to defects in Indians themselves. Sastri disagreed. The defects were there, he said, when Government declared for Dominion Status and did not emerge since then. India might be unable to exact the fulfilment of the promise, but was not called upon to smile when she was insulted. He contested Sapru's thesis that the Report of the Joint Select Committee was the result of negotiations on equal terms between the British and the Indian representatives. Indians had full opportunities to ventilate their arguments but not one of them was accepted by the Committee. The Constitution amounted, therefore, to imposition by a superior authority on a helpless body. He, however, agreed with Sapru that the proposed Constitution was in some respects an improvement on the existing one, but the advance was so slight as to be negligible, particularly when judged by the hopes raised at the first session of the Round Table Conference in 1930. He also agreed with Sapru that India had not the power to reject the proposed Constitution and should, therefore, work it for what it was worth. Technically it would be cooperation, but it would not be enthusiastic and pleasurable and satisfying but a painful duty to be undertaken under difficulty and discouragement. Sastri did not, however, share Sapru's loss of hope of a brighter future. He had the hope that the British Labour Party, which promised Dominion Status when it was last in office, would, when it came to power next, redeem the pledge.

Sastri confessed that, like Mahatma Gandhi, he had a soft corner for the Princes and pleaded with them to make common cause with their subjects and the British Indian nationalists to secure Dominion Status for India rather than listen to the flatteries of the British and block India's progress. They were looking to the British rather than to their subjects for their survival. He repeated his warning that time was against them. "The British Crown had no charms by which it could shield the Princes of India from the change which it has itself undergone under the pressure of popular ideas. Their subjects and the people of British India are rapidly learning how closely they are inter-dependent and cannot be kept after Federation in different political strata. The safety of the Princes is in guiding and directing democracy, not in thwarting it. Fortune is not

going to be kinder to them than nature to King Canute.”” The Princes did not heed the earnest appeal and friendly warning of Sastri. Time overtook them in 1947 when the British Labour Government renounced paramountcy and the Princely States ceased to be.

The Government of India Bill, based on the Joint Select Committee's Report, was presented to the British Parliament on December 12, 1934, and received the Royal Assent on August 4, 1935. In the meanwhile, the Indian Legislatures, Central and Provincial, discussed the Bill. In the Indian Legislative Assembly Government shrank from facing the vote of the elected members only but insisted that the official members also should vote and, of course, they voted for the Government. The Congress moved a resolution that no legislation based on the Bill be proceeded with. It was defeated. Jinnah's amendment, which approved of the Communal award, disapproved of the Provincial part of the Bill and denounced its Federal part, was carried, in spite of the opposition of the Government. The defeat made no appreciable difference to the British Government which went ahead with the Bill and enacted it. The Provincial part of the Act was brought into operation in April, 1937.

While rejecting the Constitution as reactionary, the Congress decided to oppose it not only from without the legislatures but also from within them, and accordingly contested the General Elections. Its object was partly to display its strength and partly to prevent non-Congress politicians from working the Act. It obtained clear majorities in several provinces, but declined to accept office. Whereupon, the concerned Governors nominated interim ministries. Madras was one of them. Sastri was invited to head the Madras Ministry, but he declined to do so because it was against the democratic spirit of the Constitution. Later, the Congress changed its mind, and Mr. C. Rajagopalachari became the Chief Minister of the Congress Ministry in Madras. Sastri heartily congratulated the Congress on having taken office in order to work the Constitution and not to wreck it from within. He himself accepted nomination to the upper chamber, the Legislative Council, on July 14, 1937.

In his speech on January 31, 1938, Sastri supported the

*Servant of India*, January 10, 1935, p. 14.

Madras Congress Government's Resolution that the British Government, instead of imposing the Federal part of the Constitution, should devise an alternative plan, if transitional, for the Central Government in consultation with the Responsible Provincial Governments and other national leaders. He supported it because it did not ask for an Indian Constituent Assembly to draft a Constitution to be automatically endorsed by the British Government; it did not assert that the Congress alone represented India; and it did not refuse to work the Federal part of the Constitution even if imposed, but only requested the British Government to formulate an alternative arrangement, free from the defects of the Federation as envisaged in the Act of 1935. He was, however, doubtful if such an alternative was feasible. At the same time, he emphatically repudiated the assertion of a non-Congress legislator that the Act of 1935 was the result of cooperation between India and Britain and pointed out that every single Indian suggestion was rejected by Britain, and the Act was, therefore, an unmitigated imposition.

The Congress Government proposed salaries for Ministers which were more than what Mahatma Gandhi had advised and less than what Sastri would approve. In the course of his speech on September 10, 1937, Sastri described himself as a "timid and humble Freshman from the University of self-denial," while the Congress Ministers had taken the "Doctorate degree"! While he acknowledged the very great self-sacrifice which the Ministers had made, he congratulated them on treating Mahatma's advice for still lower salaries as a "counsel of perfection" and ventured to depart from it to some extent. At the same time, he wished that the Ministry did not set a precedent of inadequate salaries which would embarrass their successors. He pointed out that only a Ministry in office could propose an increase in Ministerial salaries, and it would be most embarrassing to any Ministry to do so, and suggested that permanent salaries should not be based on the principle of self-sacrifice. In his reply, the Government spokesman twitted Sastri with having violated his own advice; for Sastri had asked for and accepted, as Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University, a salary which was much less than the statutory one, and thereby set a bad precedent!

Sastri favoured the pruning of the higher salaries of

Government servants but not of those who received Rs. 100 a month or less. He supported Prohibition as an experiment and not as a settled policy to be universalised in three years, as proposed by the Ministry. He pleaded that Basic Education and Hindi should be treated as experiments and not be made compulsory, and noted with satisfaction that the Resolution on the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education, passed at the Haripura session of the Congress, did not mention "self-support" as one of its essential features. He opposed the Government's Agriculturists' Relief Bill on the ground that it did not go far enough and did not protect the wives and children of agriculturists and the labourers, and that it proposed merely to scale down their debts and not to wipe them out altogether. When the Government proposed to constitute a committee to enquire into the zamindari system and restricted its membership to members of the Legislature, Sastri advised that the committee should represent all interests concerned, and should have a judicial officer as its chairman. He opposed the Government's policy of penalising mill cloth in order to help the hand-loom industry. He opposed also the Temple Entry Bill, which proposed to throw open Hindu temples to Harijans. In his view, the reform should be brought about by public opinion and not by law.

When a Ministerial spokesman criticised him of unfair attacks, Sastri rejoined: "It is not my idea to make any improper accusations of the Government, nor do I think I shall be entitled to come under the description of an intelligent, capable and well-informed person, but I have good intentions and I think they are sufficient substitutes for these admirable and rare qualities."

In 1939, when the Second World War broke out and Britain committed India to it without her consent, the Congress Ministries resigned, and the Governors carried on the administration with appointed "Advisers" and without legislatures.

## ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY AND THE MALAYA MISSION

RAJA Sir Annamalai Chettiar, his great friend and admirer, and founder of the Annamalai University, had requested Sastri to be its first Vice-Chancellor in 1929. But on account of his deputation abroad, he was unable to take up the office. In 1935, the Raja persuaded him to do so. As he was contemplating retiring from political work, Sastri was attracted by the opportunity to return to his first love, education, and consecrate the last years of his life to it. He would not accept the statutory salary of the office, but only a small honorarium. He took charge on June 26, 1935, for three years. He found the work easy and interesting and spoke of enjoying his holiday from politics.

The Raja named the main hall of the University as the "Sastri Hall" and presented a portrait of Sastri which was unveiled by the Chancellor, the British Governor of Madras, Lord Erskine, on October 31, 1935. Erskine paid a tribute to the "Sastri spirit," the spirit of renunciation and service of the *sanyasin* of old adapted to modern life and hoped that "a life nobly lived such as his will surely call out what is noble" among those who came into contact with him. Commenting on the event, the *Indian Social Reformer* of Bombay said that Sastri looked with equal eye on praise and frown of the multitude no less than of the official world. And added: "At the first two Round Table Conferences Sastri outshone the Labour Premier in eloquence and rather piqued him by his sincerity. He was unceremoniously dropped out of the third and subsequent proceedings. Sir Annamalai Chettiar, the founder of the University that bears his name, did a public service by

persuading Mr. Sastri to accept the honorary office of Vice-Chancellor. He has enhanced it by the presentation of this magnificent portrait to the University. Sir Annamalai Chettiar is no longer in the good books of the Justice Party. Mr. Sastri, as a Brahmin, is as hateful to it as a Jew to a Nazi. Lord Erskine's association with the foundation which concerns the two men is sure to cause heart-burnings in the Ministerial camp. As a sign that His Excellency intends to be above politics, his attendance and speech at the function will be justly appreciated."<sup>1</sup>

Sastri was reappointed Vice-Chancellor in 1938 for a second term of three years but resigned earlier as prolonged strikes and disturbances by students, incited by communists and others, caused him much sorrow, pain and distress. He was disappointed that the Government did not stand by him. It was hoped that if Mahatma Gandhi thought that such conduct was opposed to non-violence, his advice would be respected by the strikers. When he got to know of the seriousness of the situation, the Mahatma promptly issued a press statement that in his opinion the methods adopted by the strikers was positively violent and implored them to desist from them. But his advice was rejected by the strikers who discounted it as the help rendered by one old man to another old man. On the same day, February 23, 1939, the Mahatma sent a telegram to Sastri in which he said: "My heart goes out to you. I pity the students who have been unworthy of your great stewardship." Sastri was most grateful for it and wired back: "Magnanimity, thy name is Gandhi."

In his letter of March 13, 1940, informing the Raja of Chettinad of his resignation of the Vice-Chancellorship, Sastri expressed his sadness and grief at having to lose the opportunities of teaching which he enjoyed at the University and which had been to him "sources of unalloyed satisfaction and happiness." As regards the strike, which was aggravated by "officials and non-officials alike by ill-conceived and mischievous interference," he acted without malice or the desire for vengeance and with mercy and forgiveness, and while rustivating two students, readmitted some fifty students in spite of the risks involved.

Next to his own conscience, Sastri valued the goodwill and confidence of the Raja, the founder of the University,

<sup>1</sup> *Servant of India*, November 7, 1935, p. 577.

which never wavered and which was "bliss beyond compare." Sastri made the modest claim that he had left the University sounder than when he took it five years ago. "If you allow this claim, I ask for no higher recompense." He had it in abundance.

While he was Vice-Chancellor at Annamalai University, Sastri went to Malaya. It was his last mission in the interest of Indians abroad. Rubber has been one of the main products of that country, and the great bulk of labourers on the rubber estates were Indians, recruited from India. When there was a depression in the industry about 1930, the standard rates of wages were reduced. It led to the demand by some Indians in Malaya that labour emigration from India should be prohibited in the interest of Indian labourers already settled in Malaya, while the British planters pressed for greater flow of labour supply from India. In response to a persistent demand for an enquiry, the Government of India deputed Sastri. In accepting the assignment, he wrote to the Servants of India Society on November 10, 1936, for permission. In the course of his letter he said: "Bored and tired, I readily accepted an invitation from the Government of India to go as a solitary delegate to Malaya and enquire into the conditions of Indian labour. It didn't occur to me to ask whether it would be easy or hard work, upto or beneath my dignity. I merely stipulated that it should be honorary and that my son should be allowed to accompany me as Private Secretary.... I have glided into this business without deliberation. It isn't dishonourable; it isn't for private profit; it isn't communal or anti-national. It is service of our people, similar in kind, though perhaps not in prestige or opportunity, to missions undertaken by our members in the past. What more to recommend it? Rather, what was there to *discommend* it? My personal rank and dignity is irrelevant."

It was the period of non-cooperation of the Congress with the British and Indian Governments because of the enactment of the unsatisfactory and in some respects reactionary Government of India Act in 1935. But Sastri had no hesitation to cooperate. "As to propriety of cooperating with Government at this juncture, my political mentality is such that I haven't the tiniest dot of scruple, doubt or compunction. On the contrary, let me own, to a



wee bit of malicious glee—I grant it is not conducive to serenity of thought—that I am in a position to demonstrate in my person that I am wholly opposed to the view that leads the Congress High Command to exact surrender of titles, abstention from Government-tainted social parties and other proofs of an artificially worked-up hatred from candidates for election.”

Sastri's journey to Malaya was delayed *en route* in Rangoon, because his son took ill and had to undergo an operation. After spending about four weeks in Malaya, Sastri returned to India *via* Ceylon and submitted his Report to the Government of India.

He reported that the conditions of Indian labourers on the plantations were not as bad as were depicted by some Indian leaders, though capable of improvement, and recommended that non-recruited assisted emigration of Indian labour to Malaya should not be prohibited but permitted to continue. Among several improvements, he suggested that standard rates of wages, as they prevailed before the depression, should be restored as the industry had recovered.

His report was well received in India. *The Bombay Chronicle*, not too friendly to Sastri, said that it was “a most satisfactory document,” and that both India and Malaya had reason to be grateful to Sastri.<sup>2</sup> It was also well received by the British planters, but it was hotly and bitterly denounced by the Indian leaders in Malaya who had asked that assisted labour emigration to Malaya should be stopped; if allowed, it must be in return for full citizenship rights, which should include the right of unrestricted emigration and employment of *educated* Indians in Malaya. In his letter of March 20, 1937, to the Government of India, Sastri said among other things: “While I should rejoice to see our men being entertained outside India in service, I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of refusing labour to the countries which wish to protect their educated men from unlimited competition with ours. . . . My critics say that I have discovered in Malaya a paradise for Indian labour. I don't make any such egregious claim. But I maintain that our labour profits in every conceivable respect by being allowed to emigrate to Malaya; and it is a sin on our part, besides being a most silly bargain, to deny to tens

<sup>2</sup> *Servant of India*, March 11, 1937, p. 99.

of thousands of labourers their chance in life in order to get half-a-dozen educated men decent employment."<sup>3</sup> Since nobody in Malaya had political rights at the time, Sastri thought it was inappropriate that India should insist on Indians alone having them in return for permitting labour emigration.

He realised that his report went counter to the sentiment which had been built up by the Mahatma and Andrews against emigration of Indian labour and which had been more or less accepted by the Government of India. So, he felt much concerned to think that he had made the Government's position difficult, and assured it that, if it decided to compromise and take a safe line, he would not feel hurt in the least degree. "Believe me when I add as my particular wish that no consideration for my personal feelings ought to turn you one jot from the course that justice and expediency suggest."

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 353.

## SASTRI AND NEHRU

PANDIT Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Autobiography*, published in 1936, was highly critical of Sastri. He had not met Sastri often and long enough to form a close personal friendship which could rise above political differences. When he had freshly returned from England about 1912 he heard a speech of Sastri in Allahabad which gave him a "great shock," because Sastri, according to Nehru, had advised students to obey and be respectful to their teachers and observe the rules and regulations of constituted authorities. The advice seemed to Nehru to be "goody-goody" and "platitudinous" and "somewhat undesirable." Though he admitted that Sastri had not used the "hard word," he formed the impression that Sastri advocated students' "spying" on one another and acting as informers! He was aghast at such advice and felt that there was a great deal of difference between his morality and Sastri's.<sup>1</sup> To those who knew him more intimately it is incredible that Sastri would have advocated spying by students! He and his Master Gokhale had suffered from police spying. It is most unlikely that he would have said or meant what Nehru imagined. It is charitable to conclude that Nehru completely misunderstood him. It is doubtful if Nehru would approve today the active and premature participation of students in political agitation and their indiscipline. In fact, he has been discouraging it.

Nehru felt "considerable disappointment and resentment" that Sastri was silent when Mrs. Annie Besant and her colleagues were interned and formed the growing conviction that Sastri was not a man of action, and a crisis

<sup>1</sup> Nehru: *Autobiography*, 1947 Edition, p. 30

did not suit his genius. There are two kinds of action: public agitation and private persuasion. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. While public agitation gives due publicity to the agitator, it may act as a challenge and harden the opposite party to mulish obstinacy and delay or deny the desired relief. Private persuasion, in so far as it involves no open challenge, may produce the desired relief, for which the opponent may claim credit. Sastri adopted the latter. He used his personal influence with Lord Pentland, the Governor, and Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, against the internment in the first instance and for release in the second. The accusation that Sastri was a silent, if not a consenting, party to Mrs. Besant's internment is as unfair as the accusation that Gokhale was a party to the prosecution of Tilak. As mentioned already, Mrs. Besant, at any rate, did not mistake Sastri.

The characterisation that a crisis did not suit Sastri is partly true, for his whole endeavour was to stave off a crisis which does nobody good. His cross-bench temperament and training did not induce him to be a hot-gospeller for a partisan cause, and he hesitated to take hasty decisions. He himself admitted it frankly, though he perhaps exaggerated it. In praising the quick and firm decision of the Government of Travancore in throwing open Hindu temples to Untouchables in 1940, Sastri admitted his "weakness," though he humorously remarked that he did not want to be a witness against himself to posterity: "I may make a general confession that I am particularly weak-minded. I cannot come to strong and decided resolutions. I am in the habit of looking round and round, of weighing things in the scales of right and wrong; and, as you know, a man who thinks too much of right and wrong is apt to land himself in utter confusion. For, the moment of action is gone; time for decision is left behind."<sup>2</sup> While impulsive action may serve right on occasions, they also serve who pause to weigh.

Nehru was annoyed that Sastri became an Imperial Envoy, and while abroad criticised the Congress which was then engaged in the struggle against British imperialism in India. He was not alone in this respect. Even some of the members of the Servants of India Society shared Nehru's resentment. Sastri had, however, repeatedly explained that

<sup>2</sup> *Thumbnail Sketches*, p. 249.

his missions abroad were in the interests of India and that he rated his love of his country above his regard for the Congress and the Mahatma. His attitude was not unique and unpatriotic, for the Mahatma took the same view. In the course of his letter of January 17, 1928, to Nehru, the Mahatma said:

"The difference between you and me appears to me to be so vast and radical that there seems to be no meeting ground between us. I can't conceal from you my grief that I should lose a comrade so valiant, so faithful, so able and so honest as you have been; but in serving a cause, comradeships have got to be sacrificed. The cause must be held superior to all such considerations."<sup>3</sup>

Sastri was in good company in holding a cause above a person, his country above a party. But political differences need not, and should not, disrupt personal relations of respect and tolerance. In the above letter itself, the Mahatma referred to his fundamental differences with Sastri in political matters and his cordial personal relations with him. Much as the Mahatma regretted that Sastri non-cooperated with his Non-cooperation, he did not question Sastri's moral principles and indulge in disparaging remarks. Said the Mahatma to Nehru: "But this dissolution of comradeship—if dissolution must come—in no way affects our personal intimacy. We have long become members of the same family, and we remain such in spite of grave political differences. To take Sastri, for instance, he and I differ in political outlook as poles asunder, but the bond between him and me that sprung up before we knew political differences has persisted and survived the fiery ordeals it had to go through."

Nehru accused Sastri that by his personal association with British officials and with the Round Table Conference in London, he gave comfort to the enemies of India's freedom. In several of his speeches over the years, and more particularly in his speech to the Nagpur University Union in 1935, Sastri denounced with unusual passion and vehemence the thesis that political differences should be accompanied and emphasised by social boycotts, and insisted that politicians could be and should be gentlemen and be scru-

<sup>3</sup> Nehru: *A Bunch of Old Letters*, p. 57.

pulously fair to their political opponents and did not regret that it was considered a "weakness" in him. The Mahatma and Mrs. Sarojini Naidu attended the Round Table Conference in 1931, but not to give comfort to India's enemies.

Sastri was, as mentioned already, as critical as anybody of the British Government's White Paper proposals for Indian political reform but had pleaded that Indians should work them for what they were worth, instead of resorting to boycott and Civil Disobedience. Nehru construed this to mean that Sastri advocated that Indians should submit to the British Government however much they might be insulted, crushed, humiliated and exploited. "A worm may turn, but not the Indian people, if they followed Mr. Sastri's advice" for, it was Sastri's "religion." In consequence, Nehru concluded that Sastri had "no principles or moral or political standards whatever." He came to this conclusion notwithstanding that in several speeches and articles Sastri had explained that the British proposals could not be effectively boycotted because there were a number of Minorities who were willing and even anxious to cooperate and they were liable to govern the country, with British help, in the interests of themselves and sacrifice the general interests and that the last position would consequently be worse than the first. He repeatedly maintained that if he advocated cooperation, it was not out of tenderness for the British but out of solicitude for India. Nehru may admit in retrospect that it was not Non-cooperation, even when it was led by the Mahatma and himself, that won independence for India. British rule was at its weakest in 1942 when Britain suffered heavily in the Second World War and the Japanese invasion of India was imminent, and the Congress passed the "Quit India" Resolution and even countenanced departure from its policy of non-violence to expedite the departure of Britain from India. Nevertheless, Non-cooperation was crushed. It was only after Britain and the Allies had won the War and a Labour Government came to power in Britain that India was helped to attain freedom. Even then it was Lord Mountbatten's plan of partition that prevailed, accompanied with an unprecedented holocaust, a distressing *finale* for the preachment of non-violence for over twenty years by the Mahatma, Nehru and the Congress.

When he thought of Sastri, Nehru was reminded of

Winston Churchill and the British die-hards. He said: "Mr. Winston Churchill could have expressed himself in identical language without doing violence to his convictions. And yet Mr. Sastri belongs to the Left Wing of the Liberal Party and is the ablest of its leaders." To put it very mildly, the comparison between Sastri and Churchill could not have been more inappropriate.

Nehru was greatly antagonised against Sastri on reading a press summary of a speech in 1933 in which Sastri was reported to have pointed out the danger, if British power was suddenly withdrawn, of political movements being marked by acute hatred, persecution and oppression of one party by another. To judge by the events of 1947, when the Mountbatten Plan of revolutionary withdrawal of British rule on a proximate and pre-determined date superseded the Wavell Plan of evolutionary and gradual transfer of power, even Nehru might find it hard to deny that Sastri's cautious foresight was truer than his own impetuous and optimistic anticipation.

Edward Thompson, a great friend of Nehru, in his review of his *Autobiography*, said:

"And to Srinivasa Sastri in particular, he [Nehru] is consistently and grossly unjust. I would ask him one question on a matter dear to him. How many Congressmen have shown Sastri's concern for the Indian Princes' subjects? Some kinds of courage are cheaper than others in India as elsewhere; and Sastri's courage has not been of the cheap kind."<sup>4</sup>

In his personal letter of December 6, 1936, to Nehru, Thompson said that Nehru's harshness to Sastri was felt by most readers to be the worst flaw in a fine book, and hoped that Nehru had probably realised it. Nehru does not seem to have realised it yet.

The Mahatma was apparently uneasy about Nehru's criticisms of Sastri. He proposed to write to Nehru suggesting his sending a copy of his book to Sastri. But Sastri discouraged the move. In the course of his letter of June 11, 1936, to Mahadev Desai, the Mahatma's Secretary, Sastri said:

"I endorse and applaud your sentiment: 'There is nothing in

<sup>4</sup> *Servant of India*, June 4, 1936, p. 266.

the world equal to an understanding of those from whom you differ.' It is beautifully put. Your good offices and those of the Mahatma are always available in this sphere. May I say I am grateful for the effort which, as you state in your letter, has already been made?

"But, for this purpose, it is not necessary that Mr. Nehru should be induced to give me a copy of his book. If he were to give a copy to each person that stands in his circle of acquaintance at the distance at which I stand, he should give away thousands. What he would not do in the natural course, he need not be made to do. He wouldn't hesitate to act on the Mahatma's suggestion. But in the corner of his mind the thought might occur: 'Why am I asked to do this?'

"I won't labour it any more. My request still is that you forbear to write."

In his letter of July 12, 1936, Sastri said of the Mahatma: "His faculty of keeping private friendships alive amidst public differences is marvellous, and one wishes his followers learnt that virtue." This was obviously a reference to Nehru.

Sastri refrained from replying to Nehru's criticisms, and preferred to put up with them silently. Years later he revealed his reaction, which he called his "drawback," in his Tamil article, "If I Live Again" (freely translated here):

"When one criticises me in the papers or on the platform it is not my practice at once to enter into a controversy and immediately answer the criticism. If any mis-statement has been made I would correct it. For a long time I suffered greatly on account of this. Some time back, a few years ago, a patriot of unparalleled eminence wrote a book. It sold in lakhs. Few were there who did not read it. In that book he criticised me at great length and subjected me to humiliation. Several friends of mine, feeling that it was unjust criticism, prompted me to reply in defence. To me it appeared unnecessary. Though I had the fear that the younger generation on reading this book would have a very low opinion of me I thought that there was no way out and put up with it. But this idea of mine is by no means the outcome of the *Gita* doctrine that we must treat praise and blame alike. Nevertheless, I do have an immense faith and desire to live up to that doctrine."

\* *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, pp. 135-136.



It would be charitable to conclude that Nehru's harsh and unfair criticisms were due primarily to his lack of acquaintance with Sastri and to the fact that much of his knowledge was based on press summaries which he read in jail when he wrote his book. He might have made greater efforts subsequently to understand Sastri's character and revised his criticisms in the subsequent editions of his book, if he thought it fit. He was good enough to note with evident satisfaction that Sastri, of his own accord, made amends for a speech which he made in Edinburgh and which hurt Nehru because Sastri was reported to have made contemptuous references to jail-going by Congressmen. Nehru has yet to follow Sastri's example in this respect unless he still believes that his estimate of Sastri was justified. It is to his credit that he was good enough to make some amends, if only negative. He frankly admitted that his criticisms of Sastri and the Indian Liberals applied also to "many of us in the Congress." It is more significant that the Mahatma, who did not share Sastri's political views, did not share Nehru's low estimate of Sastri's moral standards.

Nehru was disappointed that Sastri did not join his Civil Liberties Union. He acknowledged that the *Servant of India* did not differ from him in his views on civil liberties and enquired if it represented the Liberals as a whole. The Editor replied that the Liberal Party was not homogeneous in that respect, even as the Congress was not, since they were both formed on the basis of the means for the transfer of power from Britain to India. The question was broached by Mahatma Gandhi with Sastri in June, 1936, to which Sastri made a reference in his letter marked "confidential" and dated June 10, 1936.

"I met the Mahatma yesterday in his place by appointment. Mahadev Desai, C.R. and Sardar Patel were present. The first topic was Nehru's circular on the proposed Civil Liberties Union. The Mahatma expressed concern that the credit of India was in some danger in British Labour and Liberal circles on account of the opinions publicly stated by leaders of the Liberal Party in India. On being asked, I gave my views frankly. Then, the suggestion was made, and later pressed, that I should publish my views. The reason was the necessity of correcting the bad impression created in Britain by the opinions of Setalvad

Sapru, Chintamani and Sivaswami Aiyar & Co. I said these things were inevitable and I saw no reason to change my attitude. That is to say, having sort of retired from active public life, I had not thought it necessary to get into the press, and what they said was not sufficient to cause me to seek publicity."

Sastri expressed his views in personal letters before this interview with the Mahatma and soon after he received Nehru's circular. In the course of his letter of April 29, 1936, he said:

"I am in favour, though I should stipulate for this and that. It is true we seem in this country to be better in the matter than people in most parts of the world. Only England, France and one or two small countries are more fortunate than we. Still it is necessary to take a firm stand against the increased menace to freedom. The terrorists more, and the Congress less, are responsible for this state of things. At the same time, Government is taking advantage of some disorder there undoubtedly is and going too far in its own non-Indian interest."<sup>6</sup>

In the course of his letter of May 9, 1936, to Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar, Sastri said:

"I have read your draft reply to Jawaharlal Nehru. It seems to me censorious in tone and, unless revised with care, will bring odium on the signatories.

"Is it necessary to condemn Congress policy and methods in our answer? It would be on the assumption that you obviously make that Nehru wishes an association of public organisations. He addresses us not as Liberals but as freedom-loving citizens. Criticism of Congress policy and methods does not appear to be called for.

"But it may well come in if our determined purpose is to give a negative reply. For I agree with you that as soon as, on any important occasion, definite action has to be taken, the members of the new body, of whom a considerable majority will be Congressmen, will adopt methods, which we have consistently condemned, we shall be compelled to come out.

"But I am not clear by any means that our reply should be negative. The juster as well as more prudent course is to concentrate on the aim which is irreproachable and receive propo-

<sup>6</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 344.

sals and examine them with earnestness. A forecast of the probable course of events, however convincing it may appear to us, is but a forecast and it is, on an occasion like the present one, not wise or prudent to act upon it as though it was a certainty. When it does become a fact, it will be time enough to point out how things make it impossible for us to remain in and then come out. Only so shall we prove that the cry of co-operation on our lips is not a convention or mockery as it seems to be in the case of others. Nor can we ignore the circumstance that English Liberals have always regarded the protection of civil liberties as their special privilege. Our own steps in the direction having been rather feeble and ineffectual, we had best prove our earnestness by joining an organisation or rather by seriously considering proposals for starting an organisation which *may* function both wisely and efficiently.”<sup>7</sup>

In the event, Sastri and the Liberals did not join the Union started by Nehru. The *Servant of India* commented: “To draw from it the inference that these leaders were opposed or indifferent to civil liberty would be no more reasonable than to infer from the refusal on the part of Mahatma Gandhi to join a body, if one were projected by Dr. Ambedkar, for the uplift of the untouchables, that Mahatma Gandhi was opposed or indifferent to the uplift of the untouchables. Obviously, many factors enter into a decision on such questions.”<sup>8</sup>

In view of Nehru’s unflattering opinion of the Liberals generally and of Sastri in particular, it was rather naïve of him to value their cooperation and invite them to join under his leadership, particularly when Mahatma Gandhi declined to do so. It was magnanimous of Sastri to take Nehru’s invitation seriously, overlooking the scorn he poured on him.

The wheel has turned since then. The Indian Civil Liberties Council was inspired by the very Editor of the *Servant of India* who refrained from joining Nehru’s organisation in 1936.

<sup>7</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, pp. 345-346.

<sup>8</sup> *Servant of India*, June 25, 1936, p. 294.

*STATUS OF WOMEN*

WHILE he was Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University, Sastri accepted the invitation of the Mysore University to give the first Abhayambal Memorial Lecture. In two lectures, delivered on January 29 and 30, 1940, he dwelt on the Rights and Status of Women in India. He pleaded for equality of status and opportunity for women with men. He regretted that at the time there were many men who denied equality of opportunity to women. He saw no justification for it, except tradition which was pretty universal. Women in Europe and America were well on the way to emancipation in most walks of life. Women in India should have similar opportunities. While he was in favour of "equal pay for equal work" both for men and women, he feared that for a time men would be preferred to women by employers. Marriage and motherhood should not be the sole or compulsory occupation for women; they should be free to remain unmarried and choose other professions. Women should have economic independence and not be dependent on men. The laws of property should be changed to permit of women inheriting along with men. He welcomed the changes in the law then contemplated. The ill-treatment of some women in India was a degradation and disgrace, which would not be permitted elsewhere. He sadly recalled that a man of the eminence of a District Judge had upheld the right of man to inflict "physical correction" on women and denounced it as social infamy. He pleaded for co-education and for the same standard of education for men and women and for the highest education of women according to individual capacity. Mother-craft and music might be added to the curricula of women, but otherwise

they should be the same for boys and girls. He was all along opposed to separate colleges for women. For that reason, he declined the pressing invitation in 1925 to accept the Vice-Chancellorship of the Indian Women's University, Poona, founded by the great social reformer, D. K. Karve, for whom Sastri had great personal regard. Women should be admitted to all places of authority, the professoriate, the Senate and Syndicate of Universities. He was happy that women in India had the political franchise without going through the same struggle as women in Britain did. He did not share the presumption that women, as women, had views on public questions distinct from those of men, nor that they would necessarily vote with their husbands. They were as much individualistic as men, and opinions would cut across sex. He did not grant that women opposed communalism or stood for peace any more than men. The establishment of women's franchise in India was a definite step in advance. When further progress was made and perfect equality between the sexes in matters of legislation and the entry into the legislatures and into the learned professions was attained, conditions in India would improve palpably. He looked forward to a happy time when in the councils of the country all available and trained wisdom, whether from one sex or the other, would be brought to bear upon public matters and bear abundant good fruit for succeeding generations.

Marriage among Indians, particularly Hindus, said Sastri, was founded on religion, and every detail of it was invested with religious significance, which made its discussion somewhat delicate. He ventured to assert that "marriage is today a bondage more than anything else to women." She abandoned all notions of freedom from the moment she was claimed by man as his own. It was impossible to maintain that the current marriage institution was productive only of happiness and promoted the welfare of the race. If there was still some harmony and happiness, it was because women were brought up from childhood to be compliant to men, to be resigned to their lot and to honour the notions of *Paathivratya* to an almost incredible extent. But this harmony, peace and happiness were different from what they should, and would, be if men and women learnt to treat each other as full and honoured companions, shared their confidences and anxieties together

and ruled the family affairs in common. He admitted that in the West, where greater equality prevailed, there were instances of unhappiness and disharmony. But a remedy was available in divorce. He would, however, proceed cautiously and hedge divorce in India with conditions which would do no great violence to ancient tradition. He abhorred the practice of buying and selling girls in marriage, which was still prevalent in some parts of the country. He was opposed to compulsory marriage of girls, whether they were fit or unfit, whether they were blind, lame or deaf or fatally diseased. In the homes of their husbands they were treated with great contempt and cruelty. Such girls should remain unmarried and live with their parents who had greater love, affection and pity for them. He advocated the sterilisation of the unfit who had the fatal tendency to reproduce themselves. He condemned the practice of exacting *vara-dakshina* from the parents of girls to be married. The price rose with the status of the bridegroom-to-be; it was highest when he was an I.C.S.! It would be much better if the price paid to the bridegroom was given to the bride as her dowry, which she could fall back upon in need and which would give her self-respect and self-confidence. The daughter should have an honoured share in the patriarchal property. And finally, he advocated birth control through the use of contraceptives, notwithstanding that the proposal might sound astounding and be opposed to popular sentiment of the day. He granted that the reforms he advocated would take long to materialise, for even women of the day were not all ready for them, much less did they clamour for them, but were content with their lot, uncomplaining and even cheerful, and contributed their best to the welfare of the community. He would not have them lose that quality. In his tribute to Indian women, he said: "Let it be added that in spite of pressure of circumstances, incredible in certain cases, that in spite of every temptation, in spite of every call of the flesh, our women have, upon the whole, maintained a degree of chastity to the marriage vow, unexampled perhaps in the history even of our nation and certainly unequalled in any part of the world today."<sup>1</sup> Women would be able to maintain this standard willingly and intelligently if their rights were enlarged and their minds improved and their economic independence secured.

<sup>1</sup> Sastri, *Rights and Status of Women in India*, p. 50.

"And then, what they contribute to the future of Indian society will be a benefit of which, today, we have no idea and which I can only call absolutely incalculable. To that destiny I venture to call our women; to that destiny I venture to bid you help her to come; and that destiny she must fulfil alongside of you as creators of a future generation of free people in which India today places her full faith. And may God grant that that faith be never betrayed."<sup>2</sup>

In advocating property rights for women on a par with men, choice of marriage and profession, birth control and sterilization of the unfit and similar other reforms, Sastri, who was then seventy years old, showed a remarkably progressive and scientific outlook which was very little short of revolutionary. As a matter of fact, he himself practised birth control long before he preached it. In a letter dated October 3, 1914, to a friend he expressed definite views in support of birth control.

About that time, Sastri was, as stated already, very busy promoting a bill in the Madras Legislative Council to permit the post-puberty marriage of girls, particularly Brahmin girls in Madras. He was prepared to practise it in his family but he shrank from inter-caste marriages, though he was opposed to the caste system itself and even found fault with some Theosophists who at the time justified the caste system and opposed the remarriage of Brahmin widows. In a letter, dated December 9, 1914, to a friend in Madras, he said:

"Though I might entertain radical ideas on certain reform questions, I am not able to carry them out. For example, with regard to caste, I am disposed to let the institution go, but I am not prepared to carry out the reform myself. If a clean liver, acceptable in every way, offered himself as bridegroom, I cannot undertake to give my girl in marriage to him, if he be a non-Brahmin. The reason is, not that I think it wrong or sinful, but I shrink from the social penalties and family difficulties.

"Re. post-puberty marriage, I am prepared to carry out my idea because these troubles are not likely to be serious. That is sufficient to indicate my meaning."

On February 26, 1920, a non-official Bill was discussed.

<sup>2</sup> Sastri, *Rights and Status of Women in India*, p. 51.

in the Indian Legislative Council to legalise marriages between different castes among Hindus. A small but growing number of progressive Hindus were contracting such inter-caste marriages, but their legal validity was not above question as the courts were expected to administer the prevailing customary law which prohibited such marriages. While he admitted that the Bill had no wide public support, Sastri welcomed it as it was permissive and would remove doubts. All reform started with a few pioneers. He suggested, however, that such marriages should be between adults and not children, and that they should be registered with the civil authorities. He appreciated the hesitation of the Government, foreign in personnel and Christian in religion, in championing reform in such highly personal matters as marriages among Hindus unless it was satisfied that it was merely giving legal form to the settled and ascertained views of the great majority of the Hindu community. Sastri never quite got over his prejudice against inter-caste marriages, though he was quick to reconcile himself to a *fait accompli*. Nor did he quite get over his inherited prejudice against the Untouchables in the sense of admitting them to the domestic *sanctum sanctorum*. Perhaps the only occasion when an Untouchable actually lived in his house was when Mahatma Gandhi and his wife were his guests in Madras in 1915, about which he said in a letter dated May 3, 1915:

"It happens that the Gandhis are here. . . . A Pariah boy of about 10, son of a passive resister who was shot dead in South Africa, is here with him. He annexed him in Tranquebar, washed him himself and cleaned his hair. He is now engaged in making handkerchiefs for him and mending his old clothes. G. A. Natesan's family and mine have had to take him; we couldn't have the Gandhis on any other terms."



*SASTRI FACES CRISES*

QUITE unexpectedly the Second World War, which created a crisis in human history, also created a crisis in the life of Sastri and nearly resulted in his resignation from the Servants of India Society. The proposal for the partition of India created another crisis in his life and on this occasion he actually submitted his resignation. But happily both the crises were staved off and he continued to be a member of the Society till his death.

During the last two decades of his life Sastri's interest in the Society gradually waned. It was partly due to his chronic ill health and partly to the compulsions of public life which claimed priority and drew heavily on what little energy his ill health left him. It was also partly due to the failure of his first efforts to reorganise the working of the Society and streamline it, as it were. Further, the tendency was pretty universal for the high idealism of the founder of an organisation to wear off in course of time while the disciples became increasingly conscious of their mutual faults and foibles and grated on one another. When in 1929, he was requested to resume the Presidentship of the Society, and like Gokhale, reside in Poona, train the probationers, enthuse and inspire them to feel the Society was their home, their sanctuary and their all-in-all and make it a vital force in the public life of India, he replied:

"You sketch a highly attractive programme for me in Poona. I wish it were within my compass. In the first place, you build too much on my health. I know better. In three months the South African benefit will all be squandered. Moreover, I have got thoroughly stale in the Society, and don't mean to resume

the Presidentship. *I have been tried long and found wanting.* Routine jobs I am equal to. But I shrink with horror from large questions of policy, administration or discipline.

"Now I am on it, let me make one more confession. I have always believed in retirement. The desire has come on me with double force since I undertook the lecture course in South Africa. Our ancient literature makes irresistible appeal to me. It is a family heritage. Some day, I shall ask to be allowed to retain a nominal or honorary membership of the Society and devote my declining years to my favourite study. Of course, the Society need not then keep me. This is still in the future and dependent on so many contingencies. God help me!"

It was natural that he felt more at home in Madras in the company of his wife than alone in Poona, for the Society had then a convention that the wives of members should not live in its Headquarters. He felt somewhat embarrassed and apologetic when the convention was quietly ignored and Mrs. Sastri, who came to Poona to look after him on his return very ill from London in 1923 after his Kenya disappointment, was invited to live with him in the President's Bungalow in the Headquarters of the Society. Language was also a factor. Mr. Sastri knew more Tamil than Marathi, and Mrs. Sastri had more Tamil-speaking friends in Madras than in Poona. For these, among other reasons, Sastri preferred to stay in Madras. His occasional visits to Poona when the Society's business called him became rarer and his membership of the Society more formal. But there was no question of his severing it, though he was aware, as mentioned elsewhere, of the widening gap between himself and some leading members of the Society in the matter of Federation, the British Empire, etc. The gap was stretched almost to breaking point by the Society's policies concerning the War and Pakistan.

The policies of Adolf Hitler, since his rise to power in Germany, had created deep revulsion among Indians who feared that they might lead to a world war. The dreaded anticipation came true. On September 1, 1939, Britain declared war against Germany and two days later the British Viceroy of India proclaimed that India also was at war with Germany. India being then a Dependency, it was constitutionally correct that she was automatically involved in the war without her express consent. The British Domi-

nions, on the other hand, were not automatically committed; they did so by their own choice. It was, however, open to the British Government to have sought the consent of the Indian political leaders, whose intense antipathy for Hitler and equally intense sympathy for democratic Britain were obvious to them. British statesmen had contemplated India's political advance by convention, in anticipation of advance by constitution. They would not have violated any constitutional proprieties if they had consulted India *before* committing her to the War. Their action was a slap in her face and was most humiliating to her. It was only *after* the commitment that the Viceroy sought her cooperation for the war effort and constituted War Committees and other consultative bodies.

Indian nationalist opinion was divided. Mahatma Gandhi, who felt deeply for democratic Britain and abhorred Hitler's violence, favoured cooperation which was to be unconditional but non-violent. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru personally favoured unconditional cooperation but not necessarily non-violent. Other nationalists, while willing and anxious to cooperate, felt that India, as long as she was not free, would not be able to give maximum cooperation and asked that she should be made free as a prerequisite to such cooperation. While the freedom of Britain was essential for the freedom of India, India's own freedom was equally essential for her willing and enthusiastic cooperation. The British authorities refused to free India in war time, and the Congress refused cooperation. Accordingly, the Congress Ministries in the Provinces resigned. The Liberal Federation offered unconditional cooperation, and, while not wishing to bargain, advocated India's political advance, by convention, during the War and promise of Dominion Status at the end of it. In consequence, a great many Liberal leaders accepted invitations to serve on the War Committees.

Sastri was among the first to be included in the Madras War Committee. At its first meeting, he emphasised that it was to the interest of India that Germany should be defeated and Britain should win. At the same time, he made it equally clear that India's political status should be advanced by liberalising the Government of India. He regretted the resignations of Congress Ministries in the Provinces in which they held office.

Subsequently, the Servants of India Society adopted a slightly different policy. While wishing Britain every success, it would not overlook India's own humiliating status and the obstinate refusal of the British Government to accept even the mildest recommendation of the Liberals to advance her constitution and decided that its members should not join the War Committees, and, if they had already joined, they should resign.

Sastri was not present when the Resolution was passed. He thoroughly disapproved of it. He respected the Resolution to the extent of not attending any more meetings of the Madras War Committee and ignored it to the extent that he did not forthwith resign from it. More than a year after, his conduct was questioned. Though he was by an earlier and special Resolution of the Society exempted from its discipline, he did not invoke it. If he was "ordered" by the Society to resign from the War Committee, he might prefer to resign from the Society, instead! It precipitated a crisis.

In the course of his letter to a colleague dated March 8, 1941, he wrote:

"Though you neither wished nor expected it, I am much distressed. I *am* a member of the Madras War Committee and receive copies of its proceedings occasionally. I paid Rs. 100 towards the War Fund. But I attended only the inaugural meeting, where, as you know, I pulled up some anti-Congress speakers. I didn't mean to attend any meeting. The Society's resolution on the War and its attitude to it was passed when I wasn't there. I was surprised to read it and emphatically disapproved of it. I have ceased for some years to take active part in the Society's work and deliberations.

"I am guilty of indiscipline. A member demands the Society's attention to it and appropriate action. Other tongues wag too, and there is general embarrassment. I am loath to withdraw from the War Committee. My position in public life almost forbids it. If the Society orders me to resign membership of the Committee, I shall have to weigh compliance against alternative courses of action.

"It is likely that my ceasing all connection with the Society brings relief. But I reckon that only a few members will be pleased while the majority will lament it. Moreover, the fact cannot be kept secret. It is bound to transpire, if only by the

crowding of the section that brings it about. I much fear that the Society will lose by the proceeding more than it gains.

"I am, next to Dravid, the member holding the longest record of service. I was the Society's President from 1915 to 1927. It will be a bitter draught for me when I am about to die.

"Think of these things and tell me what to do. I don't promise to comply but I shall take it as the advice of a very dear and very loving friend."

In a subsequent letter dated March 12, 1941, to the same colleague, he clarified the fundamental divergence of views between the Society and himself:

"I am distressed to discover the extent to which our ways of thought have diverged. . . . You seem to share with Mr. J. Nehru the obsession that India must grab now or be for ever lost. I do not. We shall have to struggle hard, may be later, for our freedom. Let us do so. We are not making things easier for ourselves by the present activity."

In yet another letter dated March 15, 1941, to the same correspondent, Sastri said:

"There is a big gap in thought between the dissatisfaction [with the British Government] and refusal to help in India's war effort. I am now asked to jump that gap. If I were not a member of the Society, I wouldn't do so. Should I do so because I am? I feel strongly the intrinsic inappropriateness of that action and cannot bring myself to consider it seriously till I must. That is as far as I shall go now in discussing the matter."

In his letter dated March 24, 1941, to another colleague, Sastri said:

"I recognise my duty not to embarrass you by an act of indiscipline however good my explanation of it may be. Please be sure that, if you . . . decide the point, I shall obey without further question. . . . I think it beneath me to hide the facts or wish to escape by the desire of the authorities to avoid a disagreeable duty. If I resign from the War Committee now, shall I not be expected to give some reason? Think it out and tell me."

Sastri returned to the subject in another letter, dated May 2, 1941:

"You half imagine that I am anxious to resign and only look out for a good excuse to put forward. I am not, was not, anxious to resign. I believe, believed, that our interest is bound up with Britain's.

"One more misunderstanding of yours must be cleared up. It is *most important*. Generally speaking, especially at this point, my attitude is not determined by what is good for Britain, or by what is our political duty to Britain, but by what is good for India. In my rule of conduct cooperation is proper if it is beneficial to India, though it be at the same time beneficial to Britain. Of this I give indubitable proof in my latest speech calling on Congressmen to come back not only to positive work but office and power.

"I am not so eaten up with hatred of Britain (I am sorry for those who are) that I would rather India suffered without her than she prospered with her.

"Besides, my dear K, I hate political theatricality more than ever I did. To resign, walk out, non-cooperate, seek the jail—are manifestations of displeasure that make no appeal to me now, if ever they did.

"If I resign from the War Committee it must be because the Society's discipline compels me. I shan't transgress it. If the reason must be disclosed, it shall be the reason, not a faked one. I fear my resignation will be canvassed in public. But I can and will curb my tongue and my pen."

In yet another letter, dated May 23, 1941, he said:

"You are a formidable polemist. As you say, age and temperament determine our attitude. We discover reasons for it subsequently—not always to our satisfaction and seldom to others'.

"I advocated boycott! Yes, I did. You are right to remind me. Would I do it now? Can't be sure. We are such strange creatures: often at war with ourselves.

"I have told the President to give me an order and promised to obey. The original order is now old and enfeebled by my continued breaches. Just let me be reminded. I see you may be unwilling to scold or punish."

In yet another letter dated May 27, 1941, Sastri said:

"I am awaiting the President's order. I fancy I overdrew the picture of a puzzled public trying to piece out my action. Who

is going to bother about what I do? A few friends and a few critics. Even they will give it up in two or three days."

Happily, the order was not issued. Sastri felt that he was put on his honour to do the right thing and thought of resigning in the next few days. But the fear that it might expose the Society to a gratuitous sensation held him back. The threatened crisis faded out.

Sastri faced another crisis when C. Rajagopalachari mooted the idea of conceding Pakistan and canvassed increasing, though reluctant, support for it from non-Congress leaders. In January, 1943, the Council of the Servants of India Society, by a majority vote, lent secret support to the partition of India and directed its members to refrain from opposing it. When the decision and the directive were conveyed to Sastri, who was firmly and fundamentally opposed to partition, he felt so shocked and distressed that he forthwith submitted his resignation from the Society.

In his letter of February 27, 1943, to a colleague he said:

"In my letter to the President I had explained why I did not feel at liberty to ask for the subject being reconsidered. He had, besides the official summons, sent me a letter in his own hand begging me to attend the meeting. That precluded my having it reopened. S. and K. had told me besides that my strong objection to Pakistan was more than once referred to at the meeting and that even the Founder's original prospectus was read, but failed to produce any impression. Moreover, I had been lulled into complete security by our President's previous pronouncements, one of which had been made only a few days before at the Conference of political associations. I felt unhappy and helpless when I realised that one of the basic doctrines of our Society and my own boyhood's articles of faith was cast aside summarily without sufficient cause and that it was to be kept a secret and we were to say nothing one way or other till it might be expedient to declare ourselves. You remember, too, how I had already been made uncomfortable by continuing a member, though in name, of a War Committee here against the policy of the Society and put the President and the Council in an awkward situation, seemingly unable to bend a recalcitrant senior. These thoughts drove me to seek release from the Society, however dear, where I had become an encrusted encumbrance.

"Your words show that there is still a kindly feeling for me and that the bond of tender memories is not wholly snapped. I should love to be assured that your attitude is not singular.

"I am conscious I am no longer useful or a source of strength to the Society. Age and conformity to old ways of thought make me a relic of a former age! It is as much as I can expect to be tolerated as an object of interest. Time has run rapidly, while I stand still. I realise that I must not become a positive obstruction.

"I understand from S. that the President has restored the *status quo* and allowed members to speak and write against Pakistan if they are so minded. If this be the case, I need not press my application for release. My sense of relief is almost a positive happiness. A tie of thirty-five years, dear to me as life itself, to which I owe all I care for and with which I am identified in the eyes of the world, is not to be snapped. A man whose life is forfeit has been pardoned and reinstated, estates and honours and immunities restored as if nothing had happened.

"Be sure I am to the Society the same as ever. Your letter was a balm to my bleeding heart."

Sastri was pained and hurt that his letter of resignation sent in the last week of January, 1943, was not even acknowledged for three months! He was then told that the majority decision of the Society was contingent on a number of factors and was not to be acted upon immediately, that it was no more than a possibility and that circumstances had since changed and therefore the temporary restriction on the expression of anti-Pakistan views had been done away with. He was, however, informed that there was no other solution of the constitutional problem open to the nationalists. If they did not concede Pakistan, they might have to make other and more objectionable sacrifices.

The crisis which faced Sastri was thus staved off. He did not live to see the worse crisis which overtook the country in 1947. It was as well.



*QUIT INDIA" AND PAKISTAN*

At the meeting of the Congress Working Committee in Delhi in July, 1940, Mahatma Gandhi demanded that the British Government should acknowledge then and there India's claim to complete independence and, in return, offered India's non-violent cooperation in the war-effort. The Committee endorsed the demand but not the offer and accepted Rajagopalachari's proposal of all-out cooperation, which meant good-bye to the creed of non-violence. In consequence, the Mahatma and some others resigned from the Congress but, surprisingly enough, the Mahatma commended the Rajagopalachari resolution to the Government! Sastri received a telegraphic request to suspend his comment till he heard Rajagopalachari personally. Soon after the interview and at the insistence of Rajagopalachari, Sastri wrote a long letter, marked confidential, to Mahatma Gandhi on July 16, 1940. In the course of it he drew out the Mahatma's inconsistencies and their contradictory results. The Mahatma had averred that those who did not believe in non-violence could not belong to the Congress. Commenting on it, Sastri said:

"True. But see what follows. Those who ought by this test to be in the Congress are out, . . . Those who ought by this test to be out of it are in! Strange result after twenty years of undisputed sway. The saddest part of this sad story is that among the dubious Congressmen there are still many that still believe they practise non-violence. Little do they see that in the high altitude of truth, partial rectitude is no rectitude. Those that place ethical values above all values must have great satisfaction to see you at least disentangling yourself from this Serbonian bog.

It is a noble enterprise, when one comes to think of it calmly, to make divinity out of human clay. Failure in it is noble too. . . . Go on, brave soul, your faith is inextinguishable; it is not of this earth. Yet the question keeps vexing me: How, after the hollowness of the Congress creed has been exposed as by the touch of Ithuriel's spear, you continue to champion its resolution and commend it to the acceptance of Britain? No doubt, you have made the Congress and you love India as few of her children do. These facts go far to explain it. But they cannot justify it from a philosophical standpoint. . . . You have no such double standards: what is not truth is untruth. Non-violence is the highest *dharma*. . . . Violence is its stark negation; it is blasphemy, sin. Partial abandonment of non-violence is abandonment. How can you have truck with it?"

Some friends excused the Mahatma on the ground that he was a politician, no doubt above the ordinary run of them, but still a politician, limited by the very nature of politics. But said Sastri:

"I judge you as a saint who has the gift of seeing the truth and courage to experiment with it — and in the experiment has had more success than most saints so called. That is why I rejoiced in your enunciation and proclamation of the non-violence doctrine, unadulterated and pure, though the Philistine world jeered. Nor can you put me off by an outburst of your humility and confession of inconsistency, weakness, corruption of the soul and so on. This only exalts you the more in my hero-worshipping mind, making your merits the more lustrous and your blemishes, alas, the more glaring. I place you along with the philosophers and ethicists of fame. The pursuit of abstract thought and the practice of austerities belong to us in India by heredity. To see you descend on occasions from the heights, I feel bereft of my natural garment, disrobed of my national pride."<sup>1</sup>

Sastri then referred to the Congress preference for Independence as distinguished from Dominion Status and pointed out that the Mahatma was himself a new convert to the idea of Independence. The Mahatma had advocated that if all material temptations were removed, the Japanese invaders would tire of conquest and leave India in peace. Sastri asked him if there was another Indian who shared

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 115.

his unique view. "It was neither the thought nor the language of any other advocate of Independence. You don't belong where you are."

Sastri thought that the Mahatma was asking for the impossible when he demanded that Britain should free India immediately or set a certain date for it. The right to secede was equivalent to Independence, and it was implicit in Dominion Status. It was openly claimed by some Dominions and Britain had not questioned it. But it was a very different thing for the British Government to enact a law granting in express terms the right to secede. But even this result might be secured and Britain squeezed for the purpose if things were normal in India and if Britain was sure that she would gain more by acceding to the Congress demand than lose by alienating the Muslim League. If the Congress could not ignore the League, could Britain do so without undue risk?

It profited little, continued Sastri, to blame Britain for the Hindu-Muslim tension:

"I saw and heard too much in 1930 and 1931 in London to dispute the fact. Whatever else I may forget, I shall never forget the utter humiliation and shame of the Indian party at the Round Table Conference. The British press and the average British politician—there were honourable exceptions—did not care to conceal their glee at every exhibition of unreason and obstinacy on the part of the Aga Khan, Shafi and Jinnah. We assumed brutish forms and degraded ourselves; alas, some of us were proud of our fate, while others were more miserable for the consciousness of our shame. Why bewail it now? We can't abolish Jinnah any more than we can abolish the Britons."

Sastri rejected the Mahatma's proposal to hand over the governance of India to the Muslim League. "Your sovereign remedy of overwhelming generosity is impotent here." The Hindu Maha Sabha was wide awake and would not permit it. Nor would Sastri approve of the Mahatma's idea of "dividing India and the political power in India fifty-fifty" between the Congress and the League. "Even I shall reject the advice out of hand." "Independence at Britain's hand is out of the question. Independence of Britain the fortunes of war may thrust upon us (God forbid). But Independence we shall neither get nor keep."

Sastri did not live to see the British Labour Government's Statement of June 3, 1947, nor the British Parliament's enactment of the "Indian Independence Act" in July 1947, more than a year after the conclusion of the War and Britain's victory in it. In the Statement the British Government admitted explicitly, perhaps for the first time in British Constitutional History, the right of a Dominion to secede from the Commonwealth. The Act, which is more authoritative legally, however, created two "independent Dominions" and not "independent States," and made no reference to their right to secede. Apparently, even in 1947, after the War and under a Labour Government, the British Parliament could, by law, create only Dominions within the Commonwealth, but not independent States outside of it. When India did attain Dominion Status in 1947, it was accompanied by painful partition and by even more painful communal violence and carnage of unprecedented virulence and extent, from which Sastri would have shrunk. In 1940, when he wrote to the Mahatma, the War was still on, and Churchill and his Conservatives were in power in Britain. The hope of the peaceful attainment of even Dominion Status, not to speak of Independence, was then non-existent.

Even Rajagopalachari's Resolution was foredoomed because the offer of all-out cooperation was made contingent on Independence which, at the moment, was impracticable. Even if India escaped foreign invasion, there was acute danger of internal disorder because the Congress, the Muslim League and the Hindu Sabha were all raising their own private armies. The plight of the unhappy people would be pitiable if these crudely-armed and undisciplined armies clashed. The need of the moment was for the strongest and the most patriotic party to grasp every opportunity of acquiring power and using it for the protection of the people and to postpone all other considerations, including Independence. He, therefore, advocated the resumption of office by the Congress Ministries and the expansion of the regular police to maintain peace, which was a prerequisite of Independence. He pleaded with Mahatma Gandhi to use his mighty influence to this end.

While the Mahatma acknowledged the letter with his usual love and affection, his Secretary justified his Master's conduct on the ground that even an *Advaitin*, who pro-

claimed himself as one with *Brahma*, had still to eat and drink like others. The Mahatma, however, was distinguished by his *anasakti* or detachment. Holding aloft *brahmacharya* or celibacy, he could still bless the marriage of others; believing in absolute non-violence in thought, word and deed, he could still bless even violent resistance of one who was about to be crushed by a tyrant.

The Secretary "picked a bone" with Sastri and accused him of being a rationalist and yet believing that British rule in India was ordained by divine dispensation and that it was necessary for the welfare of India and that he shrank from Independence. Commenting on this to a friend, Sastri acknowledged that by training and disposition he was able to follow the lead of Ranade and Gokhale, though he was not as pious as they. It is noteworthy that Sastri's estimate of Britain was not materially different from that of Mr. K. M. Munshi, a staunch Congressman, who said: "British Statesmen should not forget that India today prefers Britain, a European power, to Japan, an Asiatic power, not because of any innate love for Britain but because it sees in British victory alone the possibility of an honoured place for India in an international comity of free nations."<sup>2</sup>

While the deadlock between the Government and the Congress continued, eminent non-Congressmen like Sapru made repeated efforts to break it, but without success. A suggestion was made that Sapru should himself offer to form the "national government" of India immediately. Sastri disapproved of it. In his letter of March 21, 1941, he said Sapru should not move in the matter. Though neither the Viceroy nor the Mahatma would say anything against him their entourage would criticise him as a job-hunter, and he would not bear the odium quietly. While the Mahatma and Rajagopalachari and one or two others would stand aside and watch benevolently, hardly any other would do so. "Magnanimity is not nearly so common as you are apt to imagine." Besides, there were not twenty men of all-India standing outside the Congress and the League who would command general approval.

He was reminded that a non-party conference in Bombay had, on March 14, 1941, recommended the formation, by convention, of a "national government" which he had supported. If neither the Congress nor the Muslim League

<sup>2</sup> Coupland: *The Indian Problem*, part 2, p. 269.

would come to terms with the Viceroy and if Sapru and his friends should not undertake to form the "national government," what exactly was the objective of the Conference? In the course of his reply of April 1, 1941, Sastri said that, while Sapru could and should communicate the resolutions of the Conference to the Viceroy, he should not himself offer to undertake to head a national government and choose his colleagues. That would exceed propriety.

"If the country's confidence and approbation are to be solicited, Sapru couldn't get a promising team together. This is a sad confession but it represents the truth. I wouldn't, if I were in Sapru's place, *offer* to do the impossible.

"You see the Viceroy's hesitation in getting into contact with Sapru. Intelligible in the best of circumstances. But the combination of Prime Minister, S. of S. [Secretary of State] and Viceroy, all three of them rank Tories, is a tragedy for India. Linlithgow is sour towards Gandhi and Congress because the Nehru policy is in the ascendant and, in my judgment, it is a short-sighted and improper policy. Linlithgow patted Jinnah on the back till the other day and will discover—they say he has discovered—that he has been feeding milk to a cobra."

The Resolution of the Bombay Non-Party Conference was forwarded, among others, to the new Tory Secretary of State for India, Mr. Amery, in London. He remarked in the House of Commons on April 22, 1941, that it was directed "to the wrong address" and that it was up to the parties in India to compose their differences and not look to the British Government.

Sastri disapproved of the suggestion to invoke the intervention of America, and said:

"This is not the proper moment for us to tell the American people that the British are not angels. This they know and have not concealed during these centuries. Today the British are the only people who stand between Hitler and his victims and the Americans strain their laws and their resources to help them. Our Indian patriotism should not blind us to this sovereign fact. We are also patriots of the world and of the land of civilisation and freedom."

In contrast to Sastri, Mahatma Gandhi and Jayakar

approved of it. Even without any appeal from non-official Indians, the American Government contemplated putting pressure on the British Government to advance India's political status in order to stimulate her war effort. The American columnist, Drew Pearson, in his "Washington Merry-Go-Round" in the *Leader* of September 13, 1945, revealed at considerable risk to himself that President Roosevelt had advised Churchill in this behalf but the latter "banged on the table and proclaimed that India was part of the British Empire" and it was no business of America to interfere. The American State Department experts felt that Roosevelt never got really tough with Churchill over better cooperation in India, as he should have done, to reduce the burden on America in the war against Japan and bring hostilities and American sacrifices to a speedy end. In June, 1959, the American State Department published papers which revealed that early in 1941 President Roosevelt was advised to send a telegram to the American Ambassador in London to persuade Churchill to raise India to Dominion Status and to offer that America would exchange diplomatic representatives with the Dominion of India. But the draft telegram was not sent. The President was advised to deal direct with Churchill and not through the American Ambassador in London. But Churchill was consistently and decidedly opposed to India's freedom, particularly during the War and, more particularly, at the instance of America.

1942 was a most critical year. Japan's invasion of India was imminent. There was grave discontent in India. The Congress was bitter that its demand for a national government was not conceded. The Muslim League was bitter that its demand for Pakistan was not allowed. Rajagopalachari, who broke away from the Congress, insisted on some agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League. The Liberals, while reiterating the demand for complete Indianisation of the Viceroy's Executive Council, were more sober and realistic and did not press it with urgency and vehemence. Sapru, along with some others, sent a cable to the British Prime Minister, Churchill, that "the heart of India must be touched to rouse her on a nation-wide scale to the call for service." He presided over the Non-Party Conference in Delhi on February 22 and 23, 1942, in which he advocated an all-party government at Delhi and the elimination of the Secretary of State for India. Churchill, who

received the cable of Sapru and others while he was in America, said on March 11, 1942, after his return to England, that "the crisis in the affairs of India arising out of the Japanese advance has made Britain wish to rally all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader" and deputed a mission under Sir Stafford Cripps to India to negotiate a final solution of the Indian problem. Sir Stafford offered "complete and absolute self-determination and self-government to India" but only after the War and on agreement between the political parties in India. The statement was aptly but falsely attributed to the Mahatma that the offer of Cripps was "a post-dated cheque on a crashing bank." The Cripps mission failed. The Congress resolved on May 2, 1942, that India should resist the Japanese invasion by "non-violent non-cooperation" and rejected the proposal of Rajagopalachari for a Congress-League accord. On July 6, 1942, the Congress demanded that Britain should terminate her rule immediately or face an open, if non-violent, revolt. Few even in the Congress shared the Mahatma's illusion that Britain could be forced to abdicate by Non-violent Non-cooperation or that the Non-cooperation would be long non-violent. The Congress was challenging not only Britain but also the Muslim League, for the Mahatma had declared that the Congress would "take delivery" from the British Government and then do its best to promote unity in India. On August 8, 1942, it confirmed in its "Quit India" Resolution the demand as well as the threat. Early on August 9, 1942, the Mahatma and other Congress leaders were arrested. It was followed by acts of sabotage and destruction on a large scale.

Sastri said that the Congress policy meant "a good deal of misery all round" and that it was "creating anarchy hoping that some settled form of government would take its place." In his letter of September 23, 1942, to a colleague, he said:

"The Government of India are provoking; Churchill and Amery are wickedly so. But our Congress chaps aren't angels. They have blundered grievously, and some very big men—not Gandhi—are behind the destruction and sabotage. None but a child will expect that a large-scale sabotage will be possible without violence perpetrated and provoked. Excess begets greater excess."



Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, in his book, *India Wins Freedom*, has admitted that violence was anticipated and even advocated.

Lord Wavell became Viceroy of India in October, 1943. Amery, Secretary of State for India, had previously admonished the Mahatma and his colleagues, still in jail, to become penitent and withdraw the Congress "Quit India" Resolution of August 8, 1942, before they would be called into consultation. Some of his friends in Madras urged Sastri to comment on the political situation in view of the coming of the new Viceroy. Accordingly, he addressed three "Open Letters" to Amery, Wavell and the Mahatma, dated October 24, 1943.

In his letter to the first, Sastri disapproved of Amery's instructions to Wavell not to make a move until the Congress High Command ate the humble pie and withdrew the offending resolution of "Quit India."

"The War-guilt clause, it is now generally admitted, was not the wisest part of the Peace Treaty of 1920. Men of honour do not require men of honour to do public penance; they trust to the new facts to teach the necessary lesson. The War and the internal situation unfold promising phases. In 1930, I pleaded at the Round Table Conference for honourable parley with those of another political faith whom the logic of events had proved wrong. Let me perform a similar office now and invite your compatriots and you not to heed the promptings of passion but walk in the footsteps of the noble statesman who in similar circumstances in the last century proclaimed, 'No, I will not govern in anger.' Verbal recantation is not of the essence of a changed outlook. The failure of the Congress is writ large on the face of affairs. None will deny it. When Mr. Churchill made a pilgrimage to Moscow, did he wear sackcloth and ashes? When he consented to the inclusion of the right of secession in the Cripps scheme, did he make open confession of previous unwisdom? When Lord Linlithgow paid belated homage the other day to the ideal of Indian unity, did he sit on the stool of repentance and withdraw in set terms the *liberum veto* that his declaration of August, 1940, had gratuitously conferred on the head of the Muslim League? Demand not of our revered leaders that they stand with tears in their eyes at the gates of the Viceroy's Palace and strike penitential palms on their aching cheeks. Play the part of the magnanimous victor and the healing statesman.

Do not, I adjure you, sow dragon's teeth on the ancient and hallowed soil of this country."<sup>3</sup>

In his letter to Lord Wavell, Sastri appealed to him to look beyond the narrow circle of official advisers and invite to his aid "the patriotism of the land, which now is held at arm's length because it will not neglect Indian honour and Indian welfare."

"Can you see in men and women, branded as disloyal, eager colleagues in the service of India and the Empire? . . . The great desideratum is a bold measure of appeasement . . . in the faith that generous confidence begets generous confidence. . . . As nearly as may be consistent with the requirements of the War, the Centre must be endowed with the authority and prestige that betoken in the eyes of the world the early attainment of Dominionhood so that our representatives may hold up their heads, whether at the Imperial Conference or at the World Peace Conference, as the recognised equals of the representatives of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and South Africa. This is a change of great magnitude and will require unintermittent and devoted labour, even if begun tomorrow. And it must be begun tomorrow. For the sun of armistice may suddenly burst through the clouds of war, brightening the planet, and calling upon nations to tackle the hundred problems of peace."

It will be noticed that Sastri claimed equality of status for India not only with Canada and Australia but also with Britain, which was also a "Dominion," not superior to the other Dominions in status.

On the communal issue, Sastri advised Wavell to invoke arbitration as the only and honourable way out. He was hopeful of a solution if the Government would bring their earnest mediation and enormous influence to bear. What Great Powers submitted to it in the interest of peace, no section of a country's population dare reject. "If this will not suffice, it must appear that malice bears down truth." He recalled that twice in his experience, once in Kenya and once in Northern Ireland, the British authorities were deflected from the right course by threat of armed resistance by a truculent minority and hoped that the ignominy might not happen a third time. "If you pull arbitration through

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 383.

and settle this problem, you will have secured a victory in the realm of civil affairs which any conqueror in history, living or dead, may envy."

Amery had declared that the British Parliamentary system was unsuited to India and invited Indians to invent another one. Sastri said that Britain had no qualification to recommend to India a system which she had herself not known. He then recalled that he was among those who had advocated at the time of the Montagu proposals an "irremovable executive" on the Swiss pattern but the majority of leaders preferred the British system and had operated it for over twenty years. Amery's advice to seek another could only block progress in India; it was intelligible only on that view. But it would not prevail. "Not in these days can a nation's freedom be denied or delayed with impunity."

To the Mahatma, still in jail, Sastri addressed a most eloquent and moving and exalting appeal to make himself free to be at the Peace Conference and use his great influence to banish war from the earth.

"I pen these words in anguish. The days are hard for the motherland. Fain would I know how you feel so that no random words of mine might add to the wretchedness and desolation which fill every moment of your life. Bear with me once more. At similar crises before, it has been my unenviable lot to address you with the harshness of unheeding truth but in accents of love. The people of India, for whom you have slaved these thirty years as no one had done, lie prostrate in the deadly grasp of hunger, destitution and stark despair. . . . Their trust in you, however, is the same; if possible, tenderer and purer for your sufferings and sorrows. . . . Only on half a dozen occasions have human hearts yielded themselves up in such complete thrall to one without birth, beauty of form, possessions, force of arms or honours to distribute. Every true Indian is proud that he can call you his fellow-countryman, and those that you have honoured with your friendship are among the blessed ones of their generation. Being one of these, I have used my privileged position now and then to remonstrate against the way you have allowed the doctrine of *ahimsa*, of which you are the unanointed apostle, to be muddled in its application to the work of the Congress. Your answer is that you always meant to employ it in the furtherance of national aims and could not help lapses. You add, too, with humility, all your own, that you are not a

saint strayed among politicians but a politician appearing like a saint and not to be judged by the highest standards. I am, however, unreconciled and own to a feeling of grief that one so near the summit of purity should not reach it."

He then said that the Mahatma's place was at the Peace Conference:

"Dear Brother, an opportunity has come, the like of which never was and never will be for generations. At the ensuing Peace Conference, which may meet sooner than most people expect, the afflicted nations will seek ardently for brave and honoured advocates of justice, equality and brotherhood, without distinction of race, colour or religion. You must be there. Who, if not you? War must be banished for ever from the earth. . . . Would you be missing on that supreme occasion? No, a thousand times No. Pacifism, non-violence, *ahimsa*—whenever and wherever these words are pronounced, the name of Gandhi will occur to the minds of people all over the earth. What should keep you from bearing irrefragable witness to the truth that you have cherished in your heart, the truth that must resound through the ages when your body has perished? After several humiliations due to association with earthly causes, the hour of exaltation approaches you. I see you, great soul, in a vision of glory, go up the Mount of Expectancy of a weary, waiting world, raise high the right hand of blessing and solemnly utter the word which is in all hearts and which comes full of hope and full of meaning from your inspired lips.

"Come, then, bestir yourself. . . . Don't say you are not free. You can be free if you realise that you are waited for. Your last movement has not borne the fruit that you wished. Admit what everybody sees. No hesitation need be felt to recognise facts. You yield, no doubt. But you yield to Fate and not to man. Stoop and conquer."

It may be a mere coincidence that in his first important political speech on February 17, 1944, Wavell asked for the withdrawal of the "Quit India" Resolution by the Congress "not in sackcloth and ashes—that helps no one—but in recognition of a mistaken and unprofitable policy." He also said: "You cannot alter geography. . . . India is a natural unit." On July 27, 1944, the Mahatma wrote to Wavell that he would advise the Congress to renounce mass Civil Dis-

obedience and give full support to the war effort if a declaration of immediate independence was made and a national government responsible to the central legislature was formed, subject to the proviso that, during the War, military operations should be under the control of the British but without any financial burden thrown on India. The offer was however not acceptable to the British Government.

Earlier, in April, 1944, the Mahatma revealed that he had agreed to the principle of the partition of India when Raja-gopalachari pressed it on him in 1943. Accordingly, on September 24, 1944, he informed Jinnah that he would commend partition, but under certain conditions. Jinnah rejected it. Wavell, and even Amery, felt that the British Government should initiate some steps and no longer wait on a preliminary communal agreement.

The news that the Mahatma had agreed to partition, if only in principle and subject to conditions, created a terrific controversy. The Nationalists were in two minds; they were dead against partition but at the same time they saw no hope of political advance without it. An increasing number of them felt obliged to concede Pakistan but shrank from avowing it and took up an attitude of ambiguous neutrality.

Sastri was profoundly disappointed with the Mahatma and perhaps for the first time used a strong expression of disapproval in a personal letter of August 11, 1944, to a colleague.

"Gandhi has sold us. He *hates* the British Raj so much he would use any means of ending it. Hates, of course, is my word. G. will call it by some other name."

He wrote to the Mahatma and some others that he was "boiling over and should burst out."

The bitter controversy over the issue of Pakistan and the increasingly frequent talk of "civil war" created alarm. Sapru proposed a conference of non-party leaders to find a way out. Sastri was invited to accept the Presidentship of it. He declined. In his letter of August 25, 1944, to a colleague, he said:

"I never had any fight in me. Now I am useless for a warm debate. The other day I suffered during and after a speech so

much that I resolved never to go on a platform again. Yesterday, however, I spoke on the same subject for a trifle of a hundred minutes! Repentance holds me at the moment, but I shan't take an oath."

In another letter of September 1, 1944, to his colleague, Sastri referred to the conversation he had with Rajagopalachari about Congress "repentance" and the Mahatma's offer to accept Muslim rule.

"Have you seen a typewritten statement over Savarkar's signature? In it he says several things. Two of these are:

1. The Congress people, now free, recently celebrated a Repentance Day!

2. Gandhi, while in the Aga Khan Palace, sent the Viceroy a letter suggesting that the British Power be transferred to the Muslim League and Jinnah be given a free hand and Gandhi would persuade Congress to accept the Muslim rule.

"Both are true, though Savarkar has twisted the facts somewhat. On the sands of the beach here [Madras], one evening I asked C.R., who comes there almost daily, whether the latter was true. He confirmed the substance and proceeded to defend it. I lost my temper and, raising my voice, exclaimed that I wholly repudiated it and that it was damned surrender. I got ill and suffered most of the night.

"I believe there are more against, than for, Pakistan. Still here, in Madras at all events, the antis won't come out and give battle, while the other chaps are very vocal. Why is this? A hush has fallen on people, as though a natural phenomenon of terrific power was in progress, and we can only wait for it to do its worst and come to an end. I am feeble, though all afire and daren't get excited."

Nevertheless, he kept up a pretty sustained and wholly uncompromising crusade against the partition of India. On October 24, 1945, just about six months before his death, he, along with three other Indian Nationalists, issued a statement on the subject.

"We think it our duty, and the duty of all who share our views, to give expression to our concern and raise a timely note of warning as to the direction in which we are drifting. None of us is clear as to the precise implications of the two-nation theory.

Much less perhaps are those who advocate it. The country has never been given any precise details of the territorial division of the country and the lines of demarcation between the two Indias. When Mr. Jinnah is asked to define the territorial demarcation, he has always evaded the issue by demanding that, in the first instance, the claim of the two-nation theory should be granted as the basis of any further negotiations. Those of us, therefore, who are definitely opposed to the very idea of breaking up the unity of India suffer under a handicap as we are not in a position to know precisely the nature of Mr. Jinnah's Pakistan."<sup>4</sup>

The statement strongly criticised the Mahatma and the Congress for their surrender to the Muslim League.

"No measure and no *rapprochement* could have been so fatal to the unity of India as the Congress Resolution bearing on the right of self-determination for the federating units and the even more regrettable negotiations which took place a year ago between Mr. Gandhi and the spokesman of the Muslim League."

It went on to say that self-determination applied to Provinces was in direct contravention of all lessons of past world-history because federations had grown out of the union of states which once exercised sovereign independence. They had never been the outcome of a deliberate attempt by breaking up well-knit parts of a single State into conflicting and rival powers. "National self-determination in a world that is geographically shrinking became an anachronism, and in the international world of the future it is cultural self-determination which will be the best expression of national freedom."

<sup>4</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, October 26, 1945.

## LITERARY ACTIVITIES

DURING the last years of his life Sastri gave much time for literary pursuits in the form of writings and lectures, elocution lessons and radio-talks. He gave a series of lectures on the lives and achievements of eminent Indian statesmen.

*Dadabhai Naoroji:* In 1940, when he was Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University, he gave two lectures on Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India. He recalled how he received the blessings of Dadabhai at Calcutta in 1906, and again at Versova, near Bombay, four years later when the Madras Branch of the Servants of India Society was opened. He had attended Dadabhai's funeral in Bombay in 1917 and witnessed the great homage paid to the G.O.M. by all classes of people. Dadabhai was a pioneer in many ways. He was the first Indian to be appointed Professor in a Government College in Bombay; the first Indian to promote the education of women; the first Indian to start newspapers in Gujarati and English; the first Member of the British House of Commons; and the first Indian member of the first Royal Commission on India, the Welby Commission. He was President of the Indian National Congress on three occasions. Lord Salisbury, when he was Prime Minister of Britain in 1888, opposed the election of Dadabhai to Parliament on the ground, among others, that he was a "black man" and hastened to explain that he did not mean "black" but of another "race"! Queen Victoria and Lord Morley were among those who took Lord Salisbury to task for his "blazing indiscretion." Dadabhai was elected to Parliament by a narrow majority of three votes. Some Britishers, who found some difficulty in pronouncing "Naoroji," called him "Narrow Majority," even as they called



Sir Mancherji Bhownagree, a Parsee opponent of Indian aspirations and a friend of the British Tories, as "Bow the knee and agree"! Dadabhai was the author of the "Drain Theory" of Indian finance: Britain was "draining" India of her wealth. When his pleadings failed to convince the British authorities, Dadabhai dropped his natural moderation and indulged in bitter denunciation of a "destructive and dishonourable system of government violating Acts of Parliament and the most solemn pledges that ever a people gave to another" and condemned it as "un-British."

Gokhale could understand Britishers criticising Dadabhai but he was impatient with Indians who did so. And on one occasion he burst out:

"Whoever condemns Dadabhai for the bitterness of his language, he does not understand anything; whoever repudiates him, he is none of us; whoever tries to lay rude and irreverent hands on him, strike him down."

Strong words for Gokhale, which only showed how deeply he revered the veteran statesman. However bitter he was against certain British policies, Dadabhai would not, thought Sastri, weaken the connection between India and Britain and would not countenance Civil Disobedience and Non-cooperation. He would recoil with horror from movements which would destroy or weaken the normal foundations of civil authority.

When Congress leaders like Surendranath Banerjee feared that the Congress session to be held in Calcutta in 1906 would be captured by the Extremists, they quietly cabled an invitation to Dadabhai to come over from England and preside over it, as he alone could control the situation, if anybody could. Though he was at the time over eighty years of age and feeble in health, he agreed and came to Calcutta. The younger generation, who were followers of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bepin Chandra Pal, created disturbance. Ultimately, Dadabhai controlled the situation by the use of the magic word, *Swaraj*. It was used for the first time in the Congress with authority.

*Sir Dinshaw Wacha*: Wacha was born in 1844 and heard Queen Victoria's Proclamation read by the then Governor of Bombay from the steps of the Town Hall, Bombay. He

saw and heard the great African explorer, Dr. David Livingstone. In those days Hindu, Muslim and Parsee gentlemen wore on formal occasions similar dress, snow-white *Jama* and *Kammarband*. Even Parsee ladies observed *Purdah*! They dropped it on the occasion of the Queen's Proclamation in 1858!

Wacha was a voracious reader and a prolific writer. "He did not pause for the most appropriate word or the most inoffensive phrase." He seconded, with knowledge and loyalty, his chief, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, and considered his own "eclipse as a dedication." He was one of the Founding Fathers of the Indian National Congress, its Secretary for many years and once its President. Of him, Sastri said:

"To the end he never learned to suffer fools gladly or temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Especially in recent years few of his colleagues or correspondents escaped his verbal chastisement. I had my share. But we all remembered how like a child he was and how utterly innocent of the arts of polite circumlocution and of pretended friendship. If he was quick to scold, he was equally quick to forgive and befriend. . . . For my part, while I seldom remember the sharpness of phrase with which he expressed his disapproval of my doings, I recall with mingled pride and pleasure his appreciation of the unrelenting vigilance with which, as captain of volunteers at the Congress session of 1908 in Madras, I guarded the proceedings which were in special danger in consequence of the animosities and bickerings of Surat."<sup>1</sup>

Sastri recalled how even Moderates like Wacha, Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale were at one time considered Extremists by Government. "Was not Pherozeshah accused by the archangels who surrounded the Viceregal throne of introducing a new spirit of question and cavil in those serene regions where seemliness and perpetual obeisance were attributes of the chosen denizens?" On the other hand, it was the esoteric belief of the Moderates of Bombay, Madras and the United Provinces that most of their compatriots in Bengal were tarred with the Extremist brush and not fit to be admitted to their *sanctum sanctorum*! And he commented: "Pride must not blind us to the danger lurking in the nature of us all, a tendency, whenever we have unchecked power, to erect the stake and light the fire of in-

<sup>1</sup> *Thumbnail Sketches*, p. 122 ff.

quisition." Wacha was particularly subject to this frailty. In his later days, he became a staunch supporter of Government and denounced those Indians, like Sastri, who criticised it. Curiously, however, he would himself belabour the Government even more vehemently!

Sastri then commented on the then political situation. Mass Civil Disobedience was under contemplation and however non-violent it might be, the authorities could not just look on but must meet it with violence. In all probability, it might provoke communal disturbances and convert Civil Disobedience into civil war. It was a gloomy anticipation but it proved disastrously true in the event. "The demand for partitioning India into two political entities with separate national interests staggers the imagination and makes it impossible to guess the next step in our movement."

Wacha would have condemned Gandhi's aims and methods in clear, complete and caustic terms. Sastri would not do so, as he had a natural aversion from cocksureness and uncompromising, final judgments in any sphere of human conduct. One could never know enough to judge aright. Still, when one was racked by doubt and appalled by the prospect of disaster, one was drawn by the sovereign instinct of safety to the voice of the leader of men who saw clearly into the future and pointed the way with confidence. Sastri would follow Wacha rather than Gandhi. He unveiled his statue in Bombay on April 9, 1940.

*Ranade*: On January 18, 1942, Sastri gave an address in Bombay on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Ranade. It was appropriate, he said, that, instead of the anniversary of his death, his birthday was being celebrated, for he had attained the exalted rank of *Rishi*. Somewhat dramatically, Sastri played first the part of *advocatus diaboli* and marshalled evidence to deny the title of *Rishi* to Ranade. An advocate of widow remarriage, Ranade, when he became a widower, married a young virgin; opposing caste and having taken tea with Europeans, he had bowed his head to orthodoxy and undergone penance; denouncing idolatry, he visited temples. He loved man in the abstract and not men as individuals. Then turning *advocatus die*, he paid glowing tributes to Ranade's greatness and versatility and leadership. He was cast "in a big mould in body and mind. He was a giant. His studies had amplitude and depth far beyond the common." He founded the Indian

Social Conference in 1887 and for the next thirteen years he presided over its annual sessions and gave addresses "replete with wisdom, comprehension and insight." He laid the groundwork of Indian Economics. In many departments of national endeavour and uplift, he was a pioneer and was the most influential among the builders of Modern India. Sastri recalled an incident which happened in his presence. When Ranade was criticised by an Englishman, Pherozeshah Mehta castigated the Englishman amidst loud applause. He evoked louder applause when he referred to Ranade as the "modern *Rishi*." Sastri then gave a pen-picture of Ranade's lecture in Madras which he attended in December 1898. The first impression was unfavourable because of Ranade's uncouth habit of taking snuff and wiping his running nose with a coloured kerchief. "Whispers of dissatisfaction and poutings of lips went round, but scarcely relieved our feelings. Soon, however, things seemed to change. One good remark caught our attention; we strained our ears. Lo, and behold! the handkerchief went back to the pocket, the voice gained distinctness, the sentiments captured our fancy, and as if by magic the face became bright with intelligence. Half a dozen sentences, and our eyes were fixed on the speaker. Thereafter, all through his speech he held us in a spell. I thought I was listening to a superior being, all aglow with wisdom which seemed part of him—so easily, so naturally, so unostentatiously did it keep flowing into me. There was pin-drop silence in the hall; I don't think the audience laughed or cheered once; if they did, I didn't hear it."<sup>2</sup>

What Sastri admired most in Ranade was his "elevation and detachment" which reminded him of Wordsworth's saying, "his soul was like a star and dwelt apart."

*Annie Besant*: Sastri spoke on the anniversary of the birth of Dr. Annie Besant, on October 1 1943, at the Gokhale Hall, Madras, which she had built. In his high tribute to her, he referred to her tremendous energy and output of work of high quality and in diverse fields. He was present at the great meeting in the Queen's Hall, London, to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of her public work, when about twenty people, each representing one distinctive activity of hers, bore testimony to her matchless services. Sastri recalled meeting her former collaborator, George

<sup>2</sup> *The Other Harmony*, p. 36 ff.

Bernard Shaw, in South Africa and his great tribute to her marvellous energy and unsurpassed devotion to work and duty and her matchless oratory. He recalled a typical Shavian joke at her expense. As secretary of some organisation in London years ago, she read the annual report of the good work done by it. Shaw proposed the vote of thanks to her in terms which highly flattered her. Later, when they were returning to their homes, she asked him if he really meant all he said. "Not a word, Annie," rejoined the puckish Shaw!

Her dynamism and her foreign birth were too much for the veteran Congress leaders of the day. When she started the Home Rule League to put more vigour in the political agitation, they put a spoke in her wheel. Sastri confessed that he made a mistake in sharing the apprehensions of the leaders and in opposing the Home Rule League. She had admitted to him that her greatest ambition was to be known as an Indian and live to see India free and be reborn in India. She and he had worked together for India and often spoke from the same platform. When she sued the *Graphic* for defamation in connection with her internment by the Government of Lord Pentland in Madras, Sastri gave evidence in her favour. He was glad of the opportunity to show up the malicious gossip that he was in some measure responsible for her internment. She had some great disappointments. She was not invited to the Indian Round Table Conference and India did not attain freedom while she was alive.

*V. Krishnaswami Aiyar*: At the Young Men's Indian Association, Mylapore, Madras, Sastri unveiled on September 30, 1944, the portrait of V. Krishnaswami Aiyar, who was a great friend of his and who played a very significant part in the public life of India as a member of the Congress. Later he was a judge of the Madras High Court and finally a member of the Madras Government. He was an embodiment of "power" and "personality," good and great but short-tempered. He took his place in the front rank anywhere by right of his qualities and forged ahead to eminence. Once he revealed to Sastri that he had something of Bhishma in him in the heroic sense of undertaking difficult tasks and fulfilling them against all odds. Sastri was associated with him in organising the session of the Indian National Congress in Madras in 1907, soon after the Surat

split. "If he had done nothing else in his life but pulled the Congress through and enabled the Convention of 1907 to fulfil itself, he would be entitled to our loving and grateful remembrance." Krishnaswami Aiyar had asserted, and rightly, that it was not necessary to crook one's knees to get to the top. In his case office sought the man, and not the man, the office. Sastri regretted that things had since changed, and that for every office there were twenty men applying! He confessed frankly and without resentment that Krishnaswami Aiyar was correct when he judged that Sastri lacked strength of will and purpose and the quality of leadership, though it was an exaggeration.

*Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar*: An eminent contemporary and in some respects the rival of Krishnaswami Aiyar was Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar. Sastri instituted a comparison between the two giants of Madras.

"Krishnaswami Aiyar was eager, quick, bubbling, brilliant; Sivaswami Aiyar was phlegmatic, slow, difficult to move, without sparkle. Krishnaswami Aiyar made friends and enemies with equal ease; Sivaswami Aiyar seemed frigid, seldom hurt your pride or overbore you. The one was ever in the public eye; the other, reserved and cautious, had to be dragged out. The one was eloquent and occasionally impetuous; the other was hesitant, unemphatic and unable to grip his audience. . . . Krishnaswami Aiyar cared little for forms and conventions and was often rude and harsh; Sivaswami Aiyar was fastidious to a degree in dress and speech and cultivated a refinement of manners and conversation far above the common. . . . No doubt each obeyed the law of his own being. But what a substratum of similarity there always was! It was not the antithesis of good and evil, but of good and good, of one order of excellences and another order of excellences."<sup>3</sup>

Sivaswami Aiyar aimed at encyclopaedic knowledge and was distressed when he could not readily understand a book on Cosmic Rays. He treated his vast library of books with reverence, as it were. "I have seldom seen him hold a book with one irreverent hand or unfeelingly open it wider than necessary. If anybody doubled a book in his presence, he would writhe as though a baby was being strangled." He maintained a continued receptivity to new knowledge. In

<sup>3</sup> *The Other Harmony*, p. 55 ff.

concluding his tribute to Sivaswami Aiyar, Sastri said:

"A man of wide culture, amiable disposition and innate courtesy, with inflexible love of justice and a keen sense of honour, having large and enlightened benefactions to his credit, able to look back on many years devoted to the pursuit of high aims and doing things that are clean and of good repute, Sir P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar is a man to admire, cherish and present to the young as a shining example."

*Sir Pherozechah Mehta*: Sastri gave a series of thirteen lectures on Friday evenings in 1943 on the life and work of Sir Pherozechah Mehta and interspersed them with his own autobiographical glimpses. The lectures were delivered privately to a group of intimate friends with a frankness from which he would have shrunk if they had been meant for the public. They were taken down *verbatim* by shorthand reporters and, when published by his devoted friend, Mrs. R. S. Anasuyabai, ran into over one hundred and eighty pages of pretty close print. They were given under the hospitable roof of his life-long friend, T. R. Venkatarama Sastri.

At the outset, Sastri insisted that a biography should portray its hero as he was and not as the biographer would have wished him to be. While bringing out his good points, his defects should not be overlooked. "Our heroes and heroines," said Sastri, "can well stand just as they are at the judgment-bar of history. Their good has gone to their achievement and their evil as well. . . . The contribution of the sound and the unsound makes up contemporary life. . . . Let our sense of human values be robust. Let us be to our children in the pages of biography and autobiography no better and no worse than they see us in everyday life."<sup>4</sup>

Nobody stood up more valiantly for the dignity and self-respect of Indians and nobody stood more devotedly by the British connection than Mehta. During the Ilbert Bill agitation, when the then British community in India claimed racial superiority over Indians in the criminal law of India and threatened violence if racial equality was imposed by the then Government of India under Lord Ripon, Mehta said that it was in the "inscrutable dispensation of Providence" that India was assigned to the care of

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Times of Sir Pherozechah Mehta*, p. 3.

England, which would be blessed if she respected the Ten Commandments and cursed if she violated them. "England has chosen wisely and well; she had discarded the temptation held forth by the passion of selfishness, prejudice and vainglory; she has chosen to follow 'the eternal that maketh for righteousness.' She has deliberately declared by the mouths of her greatest and most trusted statesmen and she has proclaimed it through the lips of Her Most Gracious Majesty herself, that India is to be governed on the principles of justice, equality and righteousness without distinction of colour, caste or creed."<sup>5</sup>

When British representatives minimised the significance of these declarations, Mehta indignantly protested.

Mehta had a great part in shaping the Bombay Municipal Corporation and was identified with it and rose to great and unchallenged power and influence in it. Jealousy prompted some people to lower him in public estimation. Presiding over a meeting in Bombay to defeat the move, Gokhale said:

"A man with the great, transcendental abilities of Sir Pherozechah Mehta, placing those abilities freely and unreservedly at the disposal of his City for forty years, is bound to attain a position of unrivalled predominance in any Corporation and in any county. That such a man should tower head and shoulders above his fellow-men after such a record is only to be expected, and those who complain of this quarrel with the very elements of our human nature. . . . Sir Pherozechah's position in the Corporation is no doubt without a parallel in India; but there is a close parallel to it in the mighty influence exercised by Mr. Chamberlain at Birmingham and it is not dissimilar to the position occupied by Lord Palmerston for many years in Whig England and later by the great Gladstone in the counsels of the Liberal Party."<sup>6</sup>

Sastri was thrilled by an "act of prowess" of Mehta in the Bombay Legislative Council in 1907. A British member of the Government had insinuated that "orators," apparently of the Congress, had inculcated habits of dishonesty among the peasants. Mehta indignantly repudiated it and threw it back in the Britisher's face. When he reported the

<sup>5</sup> *Life and Times of Sir Pherozechah Mehta*, p. 22 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.



incident, Gokhale exclaimed with joy and admiration that it was only Mehta that could have done it. Sastri wished that there were some such men in each province.

Mehta had the courage to refuse an address of welcome to Lord Curzon when he returned to India in 1904 for his second term as Viceroy and to boycott several functions got up in his honour. He, however, attended one dinner in order to observe how Curzon took the stings. When Curzon found that Mehta took no notice of him, he walked round to where Mehta was, and between sobs, asked why Mehta persecuted him. Mehta retorted that Curzon had become arrogant and discourteous, and he wished to show him that he also had teeth in him.

Sastri related how Mehta, though a Parsee, did not call himself a Parsee but an Indian. He never attended a Parsee meeting, wedding or funeral. "Let me not be found even by mistake at a Parsee gathering."

After he became the President of the Servants of India Society, Sastri went to see Mehta in Bombay. "I went with a good deal of hesitation and with very natural diffidence. I was asked to see Pherozeshah at his chambers. He was there at the time, and he held court, as it were, about fifteen or sixteen people sitting around him—all relaxed and making merry, discussing matters with great freedom. When I went, I found out where Pherozeshah was—he could be easily found whatever company he may have. I saw him, and having made my bow, sat down unable to open my lips, but he put me at ease and asked me a nice question or two. I lost my nervousness and began to talk with interest."

True to his idea of a biography, Sastri did not omit to mention the defects of Mehta. He lived in the very lap of the Goddess of Luxury. "He did not die like a rich man but lived like a rich prince." He never cared for the poor and the lowly; he did not endow charities, scholarships, libraries or schools. Sastri had no hesitation to call Mehta a *great man*, but he hesitated to call him a *good man*.

During the period beginning from May 4 to December 21 of 1941 Sastri was prevailed upon to contribute a series of articles in Tamil to the *Swadeshmitran* of Madras, relating to the story of his life, which were subsequently printed in book form and ran to over two hundred pages.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Times of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta*, p. 157.

The story was not told in chronological order but as memory bubbled, as it were. It is his only autobiography, however incomplete.

When he was pressed to write his views on philosophy and his full-length autobiography in English, he gave a whimsical reply and declined. Writing on June 6, 1941, he said:

"If I had the raging stuff of ambition within me, I should by now have taken you at your word and begun to plague you till you had put the project through—or kicked me out of your door as a madcap. But you see, I am hard to stir: the electricity hasn't been discovered that can galvanise me!

"I have no philosophy in me of the academic variety. South African audiences gaped wonderingly as I told them of our famous monism. Bhishma and Sakuntala open to strangers worlds of romantic charm. Who in India would care to read them? It would, coming out of my unbelieving pen, make the reader sick, if it did not make him angry.

"The autobiography is not so obviously out of court. Time was when I would have run away from the idea as an outrageously immodest proposal. I realise the plea of virginity is no longer available. Alas, I have fallen. And to whom? You don't expect an old man to grow poetic over his senile amours. Yet, my dear Sama, believe me, this Tamil escapade warms my blood with genuine passion. It is awkward, stumbling and—don't I see?—ludicrous. But it possesses me for the time. I am oblivious of what the critical world says. What does it matter so long as I am thrilled?

"If second childhood may lisp, let it lisp in the mother-tongue. But I must not wander.

"Aren't they a wee bit human in heaven? What a question! It is rank blasphemy. But I mean, when they sternly interrogate me on my vanity at seventy-two, to plead that my lapse is a mere peccadillo and cite precedents from the annals of Vishnu and Indra! I hope they have still the decency to blush.

"An autobiography in English would be utterly naked and defenceless. I have not forgotten 'the ocean of mercy' and all that sort of thing. Would it avail one who has registered an oath in Chitrageeta's book and endorsed it solemnly?"<sup>s</sup>

He requested more than once that no biography of his

<sup>s</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 375.

should be written by anybody, least of all by the present writer!

Sastri had no sustained interest in academic philosophy and made no attempt to pursue the subject systematically and express his views comprehensively. Some occasional articles and speeches gave glimpses of it. He gave three radio talks on "Values in Life" on May 3 and 24 and June 19 of 1942.

The theme of the first was "From the False to the True," in which he referred to the relative prevalence of truth and falsehood in social affairs and their moral consequences. Promises were often made lightly and broken without compunction, as, for instance, vows taken at marriage and at University Convocations. Repudiation of contracts and debts had become pretty common. Legalistic considerations prevailed over the moral. Truth-speaking, he said, was as difficult as keeping faith. Often one did not suspect one's own lapses. "A conscientious self-observer will convict himself many times a day of saying more or less than he meant, of misleading where he least intended harm, of suggesting thought or action to another that he should not have suggested. In some degree, slight it may be, we are all liars. And yet if the name be applied to us, we feel insulted and are angry. . . . Apostles of truth like Mill and Morley and other great teachers and lawgivers have found it necessary to provide exceptions, however few and guarded, to the rule of truthfulness. Even Rama could not do without white lies. . . . The empire of truth is totalitarian; it tolerates no reservations; it cannot allow exceptions."

The theme of his second talk was "From Darkness to Light." In it he contrasted credulity and scepticism, faith and reason, superstition and science. "That reason is not an unfailing guide, that it is in certain circumstances impotent to discover truth must be acknowledged. Many facts have yet to be explained by reason. Nevertheless, reason has faith in itself to this extent that, as science advances, such facts will receive satisfactory explanation from natural laws. No one who surveys the state of human knowledge from time to time . . . can hold that the triumphs of reason are over." He defended scientists from the charge of abusing their knowledge by helping to destroy civilisation. "Why scientists should be singled out for execration has always puzzled me. Do not historians falsify contem-

porary records before our eyes? Do not literary men write flagrantly one-sided books for propaganda purposes? Do not eloquent men stir up anti-social passions? ... If war is inhuman and a crime against our kind, we are all alike to blame, for we all join it; we all give our best to its successful prosecution."

The theme of his third talk was "From the Fragments to the Whole." He asked if the whole was merely a sum of its parts or an entity by itself apart from its parts. "Some authorities maintain that the State is a reality, transcending for all purposes its citizens or subjects, while others cannot see anything left of it if the property, territory, rights and obligations of its separate citizens or corporations of citizens were extracted or extinguished. These different views lead to startlingly different results in the practical demarcation of the authority of the State over those whom it controls."

Was man, asked Sastri, just his physical body or would something survive its death? Even some scientists believed in survival, while others did not. The bulk of the people of the world for centuries had believed in survival, which was however unascertainable. Where reason failed, one fell back on faith or intuition, which declared that there was a human soul apart from the body, to be experienced but not to be known.

In his article, "A Confession of Faith," Sastri not only gave some autobiographical details but also discussed his religious and philosophical attitudes. Certain eminent men of science doubted if science could solve the riddle of nature and felt impelled to postulate an extra-cosmic principle which was benign but inscrutable. Neither philosophy nor science, nor the two together, had penetrated the mystery. If one faith failed them, people fell back on another faith! "Faith is dead, long live the faith" was the result, but it failed to satisfy those who sought the haven of certitude.

Regarding the impact of modernism on himself, early in his life Sastri's peace of mind was shattered by the growing dichotomy of belief and practice. He was attracted to the experimental philosophy which he blended with the pessimistic philosophy of Buddhism.

"Moral judgments stiffened to the point of severity. Pleasure and laughter seemed illegitimate and were always dogged by

remorse. Speech, too, was an indulgence next door to sin and must be limited to necessity. The doctrine of Karma held me in the grip of its logic. I was a determinist and had no doubt that free will was a delusion and a snare. The *Gita* precept of action without attachment came later, and though I have welcomed it with open arms, it has not succeeded in establishing itself as a guide to practical conduct.”<sup>9</sup>

The years brought a change in him in certain respects.

“Instead of hardening, my nature has softened a little. Travel in lands where they make more of life than we do in India had tinged the austerity of my youth with hedonism. Introversion has lost a little ground, and extroversion has gained it. Laughter and enjoyment are no longer taboo. I don’t judge my brethren nearly as harshly as before. Charity, the greatest of the great things of life, informs my thought and deed more than ever. Action, not inaction, is my principle now, alas! too late. I try to follow the *Gita* up to a point, not to be excessively elated by success or cast down by defeat. Moderation is still the silken string that runs through all my virtues. . . . The new and short-lived isms that infest this fair home of genuine speculation and philosophy and promise us short-cuts to salvation have passed me by without quickening my spiritual pulse. I cannot sign away my judgment in any sphere to another, however great and worthy.”

The doctrine of *Bhakti*, as revealed in the *Gita*, captivated his heart, but not his head. “The struggle between the head and the heart, described with self-revelatory pathos in religious writings, rages perpetually within me. It is only my lifelong practice of self-control that cloaks the gnawings of my inmost being behind a blank expression of face.” He craved for some experience, some revelation, some authentic sign of life after death. He had moments when he preferred the contentment of the pig in the sty to the agitation and turmoil of the enquiring mind. But he soon found consolation and encouragement in the thesis that “there is more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds” and concluded that to believe what was not proven to one’s satisfaction was to abdicate the sovereign quality of reason.

<sup>9</sup> *The Other Harmony*, p. 3 ff.

At one time in his life, Sastri was "hag-ridden by the idea of nothing after death" and sought some proof to the contrary. In a radio talk, since published in the *Indian Review* of October 1943, Sastri put himself the question, "Is Death the End?" "Death," he said, "is the most dreaded enemy of man. Its nature is shrouded in mystery. It is so complete in its break with life that to call it a long sleep seems unfeeling jest." People sought immortality because they feared death. Some people believed that a benign Providence did not intend that death was to be the end and invented the theory of Karma to postulate life after death and a succession of them. He insisted that belief was no proof; the validity of life after death must be proved by the same reasoning process as that applied to other assertions.

He presided over a lecture on spiritualism by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle during a voyage from South Africa to India, but was not convinced. He asked a person addicted to the planchette to summon his father who, when asked how he was, promptly answered "O.K., darling!" Sastri's father was an old-fashioned *pundit*, utterly ignorant of English, more so of the Americanism, "O.K." Sastri was shocked, and the séance ended!

## THE RAMAYANA

SASTRI had a very special love for the great Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. His approach to it, however, was secular and scholarly rather than religious and traditional. He treated it as a human document to be critically examined and not a religious text-book for pious and uncritical belief. He expounded his secular critique in thirty informal and intimate conversational talks between April and November 1944 under the auspices of the Madras Sanskrit Academy. Mahatma Gandhi, who called on Sastri in the General Hospital, Madras, in 1946, suggested their publication. Sastri was, however, too ill to revise them for publication. The verbatim reports of the lectures were finally published in 1949, some three years after he passed away. Mahatma Gandhi was to have written the Foreword, but he too passed away before they were ready for publication. In the event, T. R. Venkatarama Sastri, the lifelong friend and confidant of Sastri, wrote the Foreword. In print, the lectures ran into nearly five hundred pages. It would have been a stupendous performance at any time; it was more so as Sastri was seventy-five years of age and in feeble health when he accomplished it. He did not attempt a systematic and chronological narration of the story, but confined himself to an evaluation of the character of the principal personalities in the epic. A literary critic thought that the lectures resembled Prof. Bradley's celebrated lectures on the characters in Shakespeare in erudition, zest, ethical seriousness and profound understanding of human nature.

As early as 1916, Sastri had rejected the current and pious theory of the divinity of Rama and adopted the humanistic view that he was a human being, though the

noblest among them. In a letter to a friend dated March 21, 1916, he indicated his approach in the form of notes:

"A great variety of questions of interest: literary criticism; study of character; history of old times; social customs, etc., etc.

"*Loyalty*: Contrast Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna. Former regarded as prince of *bhaktas* by Aryan poets. If the Rakshasa versions are to be found, how would he appear therein? Loyalty to Truth and Justice does not always appear higher than loyalty to Party and Kindred. Especially when the latter brings safety and prosperity, while the former spells death and infamy. Compare Bhishma, Drona, etc. Conflict of Duty, most difficult portion of casuistry. Different solutions are possible. 'My country, right or wrong'—Patriotism.

"*Rishis* are pioneers of civilisation. Like missionaries of Christ, they, dying in foreign lands, become seeds of empire. Rama's vow to protect the Rishis, who carried on their austerities in the outskirts of Aryan settlements, was the real cause of the war. All ancient story has reference to such conflicts between Dharma and the Dharma-destroyers, the Arya and the non-Arya.

"To most simple folk the thrill of the story is its appeal to pristine human experience and the play of elemental passion. The jealousy of co-wives, the results of dotage, brotherly love and fidelity, lust and its evils, Rama's natural suspicion and jealousy, his extraordinary sensitiveness to censure, Sita's woes, etc., etc."

Sastri's reverence for the *Ramayana* was extraordinary and most touching. In a letter dated June 14, 1941, he said:

"I have not touched an English book since coming here. The *Ramayana* is my only study. On that important epic one wants to say nothing which is not one's ripest thought. My ideas show yet no sign of having ripened. Not that my mind changes frequently or my appreciation waxes and wanes. But I seem to shrink from final judgment, like a man who beholds a vast panorama and is dazed, being unable to seize the ensemble in one view, where each detail holds him under a spell. If I said one thing today, ten to one I should have to unsay it before a month is over. When I am full of confidence, I can give in vague words the headings of chapters of my grand critique. The assembling of points worthy of note should, I fancy, be the first task. But it will take a life with my measure of work.

"Curious sense one has of propriety. On other topics one is



not held back by such notions of perfection. But on the *Ramayana*, tentative opinion is blasphemy."<sup>1</sup>

Even when he gave his final lectures in 1944, Sastri did not shake off hesitation and was extremely humble and apologetic. In his first lecture he indicated his general line of treatment.

"To me Rama is not divine. . . . The man who reads the *Ramayana* thinking that from the beginning he is dealing with God will get nothing out of it. You must read the story as a human story, lived among human beings, and then, Oh, what rich treasures there are of wisdom in it!"<sup>2</sup>

Though not divine, Rama stood for the highest in man—as a son, husband, king and ally or friend of the oppressed. He was *almost* immaculate. Almost but not quite, because he exhibited qualities common to human nature, like anger, grief, despair; said harsh things and suspected. Occasionally he declined from his own highest level of conduct and said and did things which his own higher nature would not approve. "These, however, do not detract from the sublimity of Rama's character, never a whit. We raise ourselves rather to kinship by the contemplation of them. If we cannot aspire to the great altitudes that he attained, may we not exalt our nature to some extent by his lofty example?" Again and again Sastri was moved to emotional breakdowns as he proceeded with his talks on the *Ramayana*.

"A hard-hearted man like me, I read it and, strange to say, there is not a page which does not bring tears into my eyes! Any fine sentiment, any tender feeling, any affection between brother and brother, any reunion of beings that have been separated for a time, aye, any homage paid to friendship, to gratitude or to any of those eternal abiding virtues of human character brings tears to my eyes! . . . I suppose it is because deep down in my nature . . . there is a spirit of reverence and affection for those great characters. Why, even if Rama and Sita were not of this land but were the hero and heroine of an alien poem, I should feel probably not so much affected, but nearly as deeply. Human nature is human nature; whether

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, pp. 126-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Lectures on the Ramayana* by V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, p. 9.

nurtured here or in another land, it is just the same."<sup>3</sup>

Sastri's distinctive approach was perhaps best displayed in his treatment of Rama's banishment of Sita as given in the *Uttarakanda*, the final canto of the *Ramayana*. Some commentators, who found it difficult to defend Rama's conduct on the basis of his divinity, sought escape by denying the authenticity of the chapter itself or by presuming that Rama's divinity expired when he slew Ravana and thereafter he was just human. Sastri accepted the authenticity of the episode, and, as he was not handicapped by the assumption of the divinity of Rama, he had no scruple in attributing Rama's outrageous behaviour to the ignoble but still all too human qualities of jealousy and pride. Deeply as he loved her, Sita was but private property for Rama, as was the wont in those days and even till recently in many countries. He did not hesitate to sacrifice her when his honour as a Kshatriya was at stake. Sastri recalled the behaviour of Othello as depicted by Shakespeare. Jealousy in its worst form degraded his great character. Comparing him with Rama, Sastri said: "Othello at least had something, a handkerchief; he had heard something, seen something. Rama had nothing at all. All that he could say is: 'You are an angel and Ravana is a wicked person. When you were in his control, how is it possible for things to have been right?'" Sastri had no hesitation to say that in suspecting and punishing Desdemona and Sita, Othello and Rama had erred; and in their matchless generosity the wives were willing to forgive their erring men. And he drew the moral:

"So end these great stories with eternal lessons for us. Because I have said jealousy is human, that it is natural, that it is commonly found, it does not mean that it is a virtue. It means that it is a human passion leading to violent crime and must, if possible, be conquered or at least kept down within stern limits, and when sin has been sinned, . . . there is a time for forgiveness. . . . When we are jealous and punish others, we are only human. But when remembering these great examples we forgive those who do us wrong, for the moment we are not human but we are drawn up to the full dignity and height of divinity."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Lectures on the Ramayana*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

Sastri differed from Mahatma Gandhi in assessing Sita's conduct in accompanying Rama to the forest in exile. When he was in South Africa he read an exhortation of the Mahatma to the women of India to disobey their husbands for sufficient reason and quoted Sita as an example. The Mahatma had thought that Rama had forbidden Sita to accompany him and Sita disobeyed her husband's orders. Sastri wrote to the Mahatma that he was mistaken.

"Sita pleaded with Rama for leave to accompany him and went so far as to say, 'How foolish was my father to give me to you—who are a woman in man's garb!' This spirited exclamation, so natural and honourable to a Kshatriya maiden, is seized upon by our Punditry as an indictment against Sita's perversity of spirit. Anyway, Rama yielded to her entreaty and gave her leave to share the trials of the forest."<sup>6</sup>

The Mahatma was not convinced, and in his reply of January 11, 1928, claimed authority for his view in Tulsidas's *Ramayana* and added: "I admit all you say and would yet hold Sita did go to the forest in spite of Rama's wish to the contrary. And in doing so, she excelled herself. Similarly, Rama excelled himself in carrying out the promise of Dasaratha."<sup>7</sup>

Some time after his return to India, Sastri consulted the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas and found that it gave no support to the Mahatma's view. Far from disobeying Rama, Sita had only beseeched and implored him in the most humble style. What was more, she uttered no taunt like the one which Valmiki put in her mouth, namely, that he was a woman in a man's garb.<sup>8</sup>

Sastri paid one more, and his last, tribute to the *Ramayana* in his last article, "Books that Influenced Me," published in the *Indian Review* of January, 1946, four months before his death. After mentioning Shakespeare, Burke, Scott, George Eliot, Tyndall, T. H. Huxley, Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, Marcus Aurelius, Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy, and Victor Hugo, he concluded with the *Ramayana*.

"The *Ramayana*, I hold to be almost without rival in the world's literature. Whether we judge by the grandeur of the

<sup>6</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

theme, by the variety of characters portrayed, by the tone of its idealism or by the appeal that it makes to the devout heart, it ranks amongst the noblest monuments of the poetic genius."

Sastri himself rose to great poetic heights when he penned the following:

"I open the book at all times and with no particular expectation of improved health or auspicious prognostication. It never fails me. The distilled experience of ages is given in stanzas of exquisite sententious grace. Hermitages, described with a wealth of household and sacrificial detail, invite you to the intimacy of the home. Forests and mountains and rivers, in pristine untamed grandeur, lose their terror in Valmiki's pages, for, while he mentions with particularity the paths and thorny lanes, the riverfords and the giant shelter-giving trees, he makes only occasional and unexciting allusions to bloody fights. . . . Ah, how I should like to learn and teach in those sanctuaries, *guru* and *sishya* bathing in safe pools together, chanting the Vedas aloud till the hills threw the sacred sounds back and the sylvan gods sat up and listened, our mutual companionship unperturbed by fear of lightning strikes or menacing processions or shootings by the King's police."

## THE LAST YEARS

WHILE World War II was still on, the President of the United States of America called a conference in San Francisco to meet on April 25, 1945, to organise the United Nations. Sastri was enthusiastically in favour of the idea. On January 10, 1945, and again on February 10, 1945, he pleaded strongly for the constitution of a single world body which should include all the nations of the world, great and small, powerful and weak, white and coloured, to banish war and ensure peace and progress. The first great cause of war was the concept of national sovereignty. The remedy was for sovereign nations to submit disputes to the arbitrament of an international court, composed of judges of great calibre, independence and world patriotism. The second cause of war was racialism, the rule of the non-whites by the whites roughly corresponding to the weak *vs.* the strong, the comparatively underdeveloped *vs.* the more developed. Sastri pleaded that the colour-bar should be abolished, as the non-whites would no longer tolerate it. Failure to do so would lead to war. "When a colour-war breaks out, I fear it will be on a scale and attended by a ferocity hardly known till now."

The Peace Conference, said Sastri, would be faced with problems of terrific complexity. It would sadly miss Woodrow Wilson who was animated by great ideals and great love of humanity. But India could contribute a personality comparable to Wilson, namely, Mahatma Gandhi.

"No man was more generally acknowledged all over the world as a friend of peace, as an advocate of non-violence, as the prophet and seer of a happy world; no one commanded so

much influence in the world among the really religious and pious men as our Mahatma Gandhi. We can send him, and when he goes there, we shall watch with interest, as well as with confidence, the work that he does, for, believe me, he has a spirit that cannot be put down. He fears no man, neither the Viceroy, nor the Secretary of State, neither President Roosevelt, nor Stalin, nor all of them put together. At the right moment he will stand up, say a few words in a low voice. No one can turn his attention from what he says; no one can help yielding full homage to the majesty of his sentiments and to the compelling character of the ideal that he puts forth."<sup>1</sup>

On February 19, 1945, the anniversary of the death of Gokhale, Sastri spoke for about forty-five minutes and suddenly lost consciousness. When he regained it after a while, he was advised by his doctors to give up all arduous work, including public speaking. Nevertheless, on March 6, 1945, he gave an interview on the reform of Hindu Code, then under public discussion. He thought that the legislature, as then constituted, was competent for the purpose and that the reforms were unobjectionable and even necessary. While the objections raised by the orthodox people should be heard with respect and be met as far as possible, the reforms, in their essentials, should not be sacrificed. He was confident that the orthodox people had a remarkable capacity to adjust themselves to the reforms after enactment though their capacity to see the need for them was not equally noticeable.

Even the exertion involved in giving the interview was too much for his health. He had a severe heart attack which lasted some three hours. He could not sleep and had to be administered sleeping pills.

As has been stated already, Sastri had insisted as early as 1943 that the Mahatma should be at the Peace Conference and help banish war and organise world brotherhood. On April 1 and 8, 1945, Sastri pressed this view. He opposed the move of the Government of India to associate some non-officials as "advisers" at the San Francisco Conference and demanded that, in view of her dignity, her war services and her future position in the East, India should be represented by her own chosen representatives and they should include Mahatma Gandhi.

<sup>1</sup> *The Hindu*, Madras, February 10, 1945.

Along with some other nationalists, he issued a statement on October 24, 1945, opposing the partition of India. On December 5, 1945, he gave an interview in which he said that the political situation in India needed emphatic and even revolutionary action, and if the imagination of the people was to be touched, it should be prompt.

Sastri's last public statement was made in 1946 when he was practically on his death-bed. As has been mentioned already in the Chapter on South Africa, it referred to the racial problem in that country. It was charged with a vehemence unusual for him, in part due to his failing health, though more than justified on merits.

Early in January, 1946, Sastri was advised to enter the Madras General Hospital. Mahatma Gandhi, who was on a visit to Madras, called on him in the Hospital on January 22 and was permitted to be with him for a few minutes. The meeting was most moving. Sastri, who was reclining in bed, sat bolt upright and moved towards the edge of the bed, and extended his hands towards the Mahatma and said in a voice choked with emotion: "I want to come near enough to hug you, little brother." In soothing tones, the Mahatma begged Sastri not to excite himself and helped him to recline in bed as Sastri held the Mahatma's hands in both his own. With great effort, Sastri said to him, "I have wanted to say one thing to you. Another opportunity for peace has been lost. They are sitting there at the Peace Conference Table. But who is there to speak for humanity except you? I am afraid India has failed to do her duty. Even if they do not ask you, you must go as the apostle of truth and non-violence and be on the spot. Your mere presence will have a tremendous effect. You must not stand on ceremony." When the Mahatma gently reminded him that he did not come to discuss politics with him, Sastri joked: "I see, you think I am not good for it." Whereupon the Mahatma said: "No, but you are certainly no good for it in the present state of your health." After exchanging a few more jokes, the Mahatma left.

The Mahatma, with several friends, called on Sastri again on January 30. Sastri hailed him as the greatest man living and a blessing to him in a hundred ways. The Mahatma protested. Whereupon Sastri quoted a *sloka* from the *Ramayana* which said that he who did not see Rama or whom Rama did not see was despised by every one in the

world. He spoke of his trance the previous day when he had written a beautiful essay on the episode when Sita persuaded Hanuman to spare from his wrath the minions of Ravana who merely carried the orders of their master in humiliating her; they were not guilty themselves. It was forgiveness, said Sita, that made life worth living. Forgiveness was divine and was the noblest of virtues. None was so free from error that he did not need to be forgiven. She regretted that there were not two or three people who dared to tell the truth to Ravana, the King of Ceylon, and save him from wrongdoing. Turning to the Mahatma, Sastri said: "That is the duty we owe to friends and we fail to discharge. I have done that for you once or twice, and as for you, you do it and sometimes publicly, much to the consternation of everybody. But it is the noblest office of friendship."

The Mahatma paid a third visit to Sastri though he had only three hours in Madras and had several engagements to fulfil. It was a Monday, when the Mahatma observed silence. Therefore, while Sastri talked, the Mahatma replied on paper. Deeply moved, Sastri said:

"Brother, you have done me an exceptional honour, especially by paying this visit when you were in a great hurry. You are nearer and dearer to me than my own brothers, sons and other members of the family. We have come together by some inner affinity. No external reason can explain our friendship. Gokhale was but the occasion of it."

And drawing nearer the Mahatma, he whispered: "I won't waste words. You know what I want to say."

He became breathless with emotion. The Mahatma waved Sastri a fond farewell.

Sastri's health steadily and gradually grew worse. And he passed away at 10.35 p.m. on April 17, 1946. He was conscious till about fifteen minutes before the end and was speaking to the members of his family. He then lost consciousness and did not regain it.

The news appeared in the morning papers on the 18th, and a stream of relatives, friends and admirers called at his house "Svagatam" to pay their last respects. His mortal remains were cremated according to orthodox Brahmin rites. Crushed by the bereavement, his great friend, T. R.



Venkatarama Sastri, exclaimed at the funeral pyre: "Living corpses mourn the dead."

Tributes from India and abroad poured in. Two may suffice here. Mahatma Gandhi said:

"Death has removed not only from us but from the world one of India's best sons. That he loved India passionately everyone who knew him could see. When I saw him last in Madras, he could talk of nothing but India and her culture, for which he lived and died. I am sure he had no thought of himself even when he seemed to be on his death-bed. His Sanskrit learning was as great as, if not greater than, his English. I must not permit myself to say more save this that, though we differed in politics, our hearts were one, and I could never think that his patriotism was less than that of the tallest patriot. Sastri, the man, lives, though his body is reduced to ashes."

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu said:

"In the death of Srinivasa Sastri India has lost one of her most distinguished sons of the older generation. It is a grief to all who loved and admired his many brilliant gifts that death has silenced, the golden voice that charmed innumerable men and women in three continents, the golden words that conveyed to the young nations of the West the gracious message of India's culture and philosophy. Next to Rabindranath Tagore, Sastri was the greatest ambassador and interpreter of Indian culture abroad.

"His noble exposition of India's religion, culture and art was a revelation to multitudes of people whose minds and imaginations were quickened to better appreciation and understanding of our great country. Herein lay his most enduring contribution to the nation. Shy and sensitive by temperament, his early training and experience made him more fitted for such international cultural embassies abroad than for the storm and stress of controversial politics at home; as he wrote to me long ago, 'I have lived too long in the shelter of the school-room to be able to adjust myself to the noise of the market-place.'

"But, though his approach to political problems was somewhat cautious and even conservative, in recent years he seemed to have developed closer sympathy with the more dynamic ideals and programmes of the more actively-nationalist sections of the Indian people. His gentle patience with the existing system of

government in India was at an end, and he was looking with eager and touching faith to the coming of freedom to India and the participation of India's chosen representatives in the councils of the nations of the world for the promotion of peace and the establishment of world-fellowship. Though the night was still dark, his prescient eyes could see the faint glimmering of the colours of the dawn. I hope, nay, I think, he passed away happy in the belief and the certainty that the dawn was about to break in India."

## SIDELIGHTS

*In the Critic's Shoes:* Though the *Bengalee* of Calcutta and Sastri represented the Liberals in India, the former had the reputation of being the most moderate and the latter the most extremist among them. They were at either pole of the Liberal Party. Sastri criticised the speech of the Viceroy to the Simla session of the Indian Legislature in September, 1925. The *Bengalee* "belaboured" him for it. Impenitent, he criticised the Viceroy's speech to the Delhi session of the Legislature in January, 1926, and expected that the *Bengalee* would belabour him once again. Just for the fun of it, he himself drafted an article criticising his own criticism of the Viceroy's speech and sent it to the editor of the *Bengalee* for publication as its leading article! The sport that he was, the Editor did publish it as the leading article in the *Bengalee* of February 2, 1926, without, of course, disclosing its real authorship.<sup>1</sup> The article said:

"The President of the Servants of India Society writes an article of portentous length in his paper on the Viceroy's recent speech. Our dominant thought, after finishing it, is one of regret that a sound piece of writing should have been marred by an unseasonable complaint and a querulous tone. If we should co-operate, what is the gain of summing up the faults, however true, of the party with whom we are to cooperate? . . . Every several word of what he writes would be just and true in its place, but it is obvious to us, though it is not apparent to him, that the article, like the one before us, speaking continually in two voices and in two different moods, can scarcely have the beneficial effect on the reading public, which it is intended to

<sup>1</sup> Kodanda Rao's Diary, January 27 and February 7, 1926.

have. . . . On this occasion too we cannot help feeling that there is a big hiatus between the opening and the end of his article. . . . If Mr. Sastri were at all consistent, he should have wound up with an appeal to his countrymen to be bitter and nasty to the end of the chapter. Instead, his concluding paragraph is replete with wise maxims and unexceptionable sentiments, which we heartily commend to our readers. . . . Belabour him we will not, but he will forgive us if we request him not to be so hard, as he is disposed to be, on those who wish to produce an atmosphere favourable for cooperation with Government. Let Mr. Sastri follow his own better example."

*Mastery of English*: Sastri's command of the English language was remarkable. It was even amazing considering that he did not learn it from English teachers, but from a dictionary—*Webster's English Dictionary*, as he himself testified in his personal letter of December 14, 1940, to a friend!

"From my college days I have been a pupil of Webster. As soon as I became a teacher—I did so at 18—I bought this Dictionary, and for years it was my teacher. I consulted it almost every hour of the day, except when I slept or took outdoor exercise. I bought every new edition as it came out, and at the moment of writing, they repose in front of me, to the right and to the left, the two latest volumes. I am grown, I regret, too weak to handle each volume with one hand!

"When at Annamalainagar, I taught Elocution (with pronunciation emphasised) to the classes regularly; then once again Webster became my constant companion."

The Dictionary was indeed his constant companion for life. Wherever he was, a copy of it had to be found and placed on his table, at his elbow. Often and often he would open the book and con over the words for their pronunciation and delicate shades of meaning.

He conducted for some weeks an elocution class for a group of select teachers in Poona in February, 1942.

His instinct for correct grammar and syntax was almost uncanny. A mistake in either hurt him, though he hardly ever betrayed his suffering. He displayed his high sensitiveness when he drew out the distinction between the correct use of "That" and "Which" in his article in the *Servant*

of *India* of June 17, 1920. David Lloyd George, as Prime Minister of Britain, had given a pledge that Turkey would not be deprived of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace "which" were predominantly Turkish in race. There was a debate between *The Madras Mail* and *The Times of India* (which were British) and the *Indian Social Reformer* (which was Indian) whether the use of "that" instead of "which" by Lloyd George would have saved him from the charge of having broken his pledge. In concluding his disquisition, Sastri said: "Mr. Lloyd George was wrong to give a pledge and fail to fulfil it. *The Madras Mail* was wrong to defend him and still more wrong to base its defence on a grammatical nicety. The *Indian Social Reformer* was wrong in laying down a broad proposition on the use of *which* without proper authority. *The Times of India* writer was wrong to give away the Prime Minister easily as a slipshod speaker of English. When so many are wrong, one is naturally diffident." Then with sly humour, he concluded: "Still, if anyone says that the foregoing criticism is wrong the odds are that he is wrong!"

In a speech he delivered in Nagpur in 1935 he used the phrase "peak of the summit" and it raised a lively controversy as to its correctness. Once he used the word "flagitious" which drove several scholars to the dictionary for its meaning!

As an anticlimax, it may be recalled that an English lady in South Africa enquired seriously if Sastri, being an Indian, knew English!

*Mahatma Gandhi's Autobiography*: The first edition of the English translation of the book was sent to Sastri in 1935 for suggestions for improving its language and diction. His suggestions were incorporated in its second edition. In readily offering his cooperation, he stipulated that his name should not be disclosed. He suggested, among others, that the first person singular should be dropped as far as possible: "the omission was not *required* by grammar or idiom, but will be in the nature of improvement." He admitted that the comma was a bugbear in punctuation and conceded that punctuation was nearly as much a matter of the author's style as his choice of words.

*Public Speaking*: It has already been stated that Sastri

delivered the Kamala Lectures to the Calcutta University and the Lectures on Gokhale to the Mysore University, each of which ran over a hundred pages in print, without a written script. He had cultivated this habit early in his life. In August, 1908, the then Gaekwar of Baroda visited the Servants of India Society at the instance of Gokhale and watched the discussion of a public question by the members. In his letter of August 9, 1908, to a friend, Sastri wrote: "The Gaekwar was greatly pleased—with the manner, I am sure, than with the matter, of my speech. After a word of praise, he asked to see my notes, which consisted of about ten key-words on a slip of paper written in large hand in consideration of my long sight."<sup>2</sup> Elaborate notes disturbed him. His procedure was to think out the subject carefully and fix in his mind the principal points of his lecture, and then trust to luck for the appropriate words as he spoke. And they never failed him. He would speak without hesitation, without halting for words and without changing the subject. Even when his speech was interrupted by a violent disturbance he would resume it where he left as if there were no interruption. He cultivated the habit of compressing his ideas within the minimum compass and express them clearly. At the Round Table Conference in London, the British Prime Minister, who spoke first, allotted five minutes for subsequent speeches. One speaker took forty-five, much to the distress of the Prime Minister. Sastri respected the time-limit and in a brief speech condensed several points. He was complimented for his "marvel of compression."

Notwithstanding his long experience of successful public speaking, Sastri experienced some nervousness at the beginning of every speech but soon got over it. All the same, he would promise himself not to speak again — only to ignore it! There were a few occasions when he felt he lost the thread of his speech and was bewildered. He was invited to address the English Association in Baltimore, U.S.A., in 1922. In view of its distinguished character, he made special preparations for his speech. But when he got up to speak, his memory failed. He continued to speak, groping for his pre-arranged ideas. But they did not reappear but, strangely enough, a new set of ideas came to him, and he pursued them, arranging them as he went along. He felt that he had

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 47.

failed utterly, but was gratified to be told that his speech was superb, as usual.

It was only on rare occasions that Sastri read out a prepared speech. One such occasion was when he unveiled the statue of Sir Dinshaw Wacha in Bombay; and another was at the reception given by Sir Ali Imam in London on August 2, 1923, in denouncing the British Government's outrageous decision on Kenya.

Sastri was rather slow in dictation. He could be taken down on a typewriter without the intervention of shorthand. Interruption did not break the thread of his dictation. Normally he would not read the dictated matter to see if it was continuous.

He was fond of writing letters, often short ones of a few lines, to friends, in some cases almost daily.

*Tamil:* Sastri was a scholar in Tamil also and spoke it as well as he spoke English. In India, more so in Madras, he had occasions to use it. Abroad, he welcomed every opportunity to meet Tamil-knowing people and talk to them in that language. In South Africa he used to spend hours in Indian homes where Tamil was spoken.

*Rhodes Memorial Lectureship:* In 1932 Sastri received an invitation from the Rt. Hon'ble H.A.L. Fisher to accept the Rhodes Memorial Lectureship which involved spending a term and giving at least three lectures in Oxford in 1933. Among the previous lecturers were such eminent scholars and statesmen as Sir Robert Borden of Canada, Gen. J. C. Smuts of South Africa and Prof. Albert Einstein. As such, Sastri considered the invitation to him as "an exceedingly great honour." Accepting it would incidentally enable Sastri to be in England when the Joint Select Committee was considering the White Paper. His health might improve. After considerable deliberation, he declined it. In the course of his letter of September 5, 1932, to a colleague, he said: "Health, I fear, forbids. Supposing I lived to prepare the lectures, the thought of having to get up and speak before the most learned audience in the world would kill me. I fear I must be content with the honour of having been offered it."<sup>3</sup> The invitation was renewed subsequently by Lord Lothian; later still, he was sounded if he would accept, if invited. He

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 319.

declined every time.

*Food and Drink:* Born in a very orthodox Brahmin Vaidik family well before the turn of the century and in a small rural village, Sastri was by social inheritance a strict vegetarian and was used to spiced Tamil food. Later in life, when he came into social contact with Britishers, he made a slight departure in favour of eggs and began to relish vegetarian food cooked in the European style and to prefer even Indian cooking with very little spicing. Though he had travelled more than once to England and South Africa and once to the British Dominions and America, he remained a loyal vegetarian—except on one occasion.

During his visit to Paris in 1931 he suffered a bad heart attack. A local heart-specialist, curiously enough, prohibited eggs and prescribed fish instead! Sastri recoiled from the prospect of eating fish. He was assured that the dish would be so cooked for him that he would not know he was eating fish. But, when the critical moment arrived, his courage sagged. He wanted a companion to “sin” with him and would take the plunge if I shared the adventure! I refused on the ground that I was under no “medical orders” to eat fish and, to avoid friendly conscription, I fled to my room and locked myself in, until the line clear was given! Once the ice was broken, Sastri continued to eat fish, but only for a few months. He then dropped it and reverted to eggs.

There was another lapse, but unintended. On March 12, 1917, he moved a resolution in the Indian Legislative Council opposing the exodus of the Government of India to Simla, the hill-station. He granted that Delhi was frightfully hot in summer. But most of its citizens, including some high officials, stayed on and mitigated the effects of heat by the use of fans, ices and other amenities. He invited the Government of India to do the same, for one touch of privation shared made the tax-gatherer kin to the tax-payer. But there was one nuisance in Delhi which he did not know how to avoid, namely, flies! And he humorously recounted how he accidentally became a non-vegetarian! “Perhaps they have some influence, which all members of the Council may not suspect, on the proceedings even of this Council. As I was speaking here on the 28th February last and making some wicked comments, I fear, on the activities of the Edu-



cation Department of the Government of India, one of these pests entered my mouth and stuck in my throat. For a moment my vituperative eloquence was choked, and I was nearly suspecting that this wretched thing was in the secret pay of the Department of Education! With a vigorous effort I held him prisoner there, got through my business, and a little later a cup of hot coffee helped me to gulp him down, though I became for the time being, I am sorry to say, against the principle of my religion, a non-vegetarian!"

Sastri never missed coffee and never took tea. He took just one cup of coffee first thing in the morning and another about two in the afternoon; no more and no less. But the two cups he must have at any cost. When he travelled in north India, where coffee was practically unknown particularly in the early part of the century, it was a job to produce coffee for him. Only the European Refreshment Rooms could make coffee at all, and they made very bad coffee.

Mrs. Sastri was also addicted to coffee; she could not do without a cup in the morning and another in the afternoon. Once she and Sastri were guests of a friend in Agra, whose women observed *purdah*. A visit to Taj Mahal was arranged for the afternoon. But as Mrs. Sastri did not emerge from the *zenana*, the visit had to be cancelled: the reason: she did not have her afternoon cup of coffee! She was down with a bad headache. I had procured coffee for him and presumed that Mrs. Sastri would have been served in the *zenana*. She was not offered, and she did not ask, and I could not go in to enquire!

Mrs. Besant was a great connoisseur of coffee and made her own brew early morning. It was strong, extra strong. When Sastri was her guest at the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras, she used to walk across from her room to the guest-house with her own brand of coffee for Sastri.

Sastri liked milk and sugar with his coffee. On the voyage to South Africa, the Habibullah Delegation paid a courtesy call on the then Sultan of Zanzibar in his Palace. As Arab custom would have it, black coffee with no sugar was served to the guests. Luckily, the cups were small in size. Even so, Sastri could not gulp down the quinine-like coffee. He was sitting next to the Sultan, with little chance of escaping notice. With deliberate absent-mindedness he set the cup on the tea-poy next to him and forgot! A diplomatic incident was averted!

Both by upbringing and conviction, Sastri avoided alcoholic drinks. When the occasion arose, he drank toasts in soft drinks. When he was Agent-General in South Africa, he served alcoholic drinks to his White guests but only after Mr. C. F. Andrews had left South Africa and there was no danger of his reporting to Mahatma Gandhi. On very rare occasions and more particularly in private family parties and once or twice a year on festive occasions, he relented to the extent of taking about half an ounce of sherry!

*Sastri's Shyness:* Sastri was shy and sensitive to a degree; he would hang back till invited, rather than push himself to the front. He had, however, some confidence that he would be invited, if only at the end. In his personal letter, dated August 21, 1921, he related that Montagu had confided many things about himself to Sastri who felt honoured but also oppressed thereby. "I felt it a great honour for me, and I went home, would you believe it?, not full of pride of importance but oppressed with the burden and fearful of some impending fall! This, of course, is mere superstition, the presentiment which mars the happiness of an over-conscientious man who fears that his acquisitions have overtaken his deserts."<sup>4</sup> Twenty years later, in his letter of June 7, 1941, he referred to his incurable diffidence.

"A few years ago I used to plague myself with examination of my past and the contemplation of the great chasm between what might have been and what was. If Balfour and Mrs. Besant had to lament their failures, where am I?

"Now I have a solace, but you will be surprised, perhaps shocked, to know it. What would it have signified to the world, I ask, if I had realised my possibilities to the full?

"True pessimism, you say. Stern reality, I rejoin.

"Pray do not imagine I have a grievance against the world. I have none. On the contrary, the world has been kind; not only tolerant, but generous. A diffident, ungrasping man is generally at a disadvantage; but luck has been friendly to me. Good things have sought me, occasionally found me timid and hesitant. I have not actually run away from such opportunities, conscience-stricken and scared; I have sat up and done my duty. But I was never eager, not at all ambitious and sadly deficient in the

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 167.

quality of adventure. If I sat at the table of the mighty, I was content to eat what I needed. I did not shout for the viands and costly wines and gorge myself. To speak the truth, I was every moment weighed down by the feeling that I had strayed out of bounds. I never settled down where I was stationed, but sat on the edge of the chair, ready to vacate if stared at questioningly by the steward.

"Conquerors must be made of sterner stuff."<sup>5</sup>

Sastri was gentle to a fault; he would suffer quietly rather than cause suffering to others. Some of his friends were somewhat inconsiderate to him, and he had to be rescued from them. Because of his personality and position in public life, several high-ranking officers, civil and military, used to call on him for consultation on important matters. Some of his inconsiderate friends used to walk in unceremoniously on such occasions, as if unaware that Sastri had a visitor. Sastri was too polite to show the slightest irritation at the unwelcome and disturbing intrusion, though he suffered inwardly. More than once I had to rescue him by drawing away the intruder and draw on myself the consequent unpleasantness. He was so shy and reticent that his personal needs and wishes had to be anticipated, for he would not tell or ask if they involved any trouble to anybody. If things did not happen as he wished, he would quietly suffer and not complain or admonish. It was only long after that a chance remark would disclose that he had wished things had happened differently.

He had keen observation and keener memory for even inconsequential things. He would observe, for instance, the gait of a lady and the colour of her sari, which hardly any other of his friends had noticed. But when later somebody made a mistake about them, he would correct him.

*Narrow Escape:* Once in South Africa, Sastri narrowly escaped violent death. During one of our morning walks, Sastri and I came to a railway double-track level-crossing next to a station, with a stationary train on the far-track. As we were crossing the nearest track and Sastri had one foot on the nearest rail, the gates closed and the train began to move. Retreat being cut off, we stood where we were, watching the noisy train steam past. All of a sudden, I

<sup>5</sup> *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 376.

noticed a huge black monster bearing down on us on the near track and round the bend and in the opposite direction. Instinctively, I grabbed Sastri by his arm and dragged him away from the track, while the express train at full speed rushed past in the fraction of a second. Sastri was saved by an inch, as it were! Dazed and shaken, we paused awhile to recover before resuming our walk.

*Nellie, the Elephant*: Sastri thought that the present of an elephant from India would be a promising ambassador of goodwill, particularly to the children of Durban, South Africa. So in 1928, when he was Agent of the Government of India in South Africa, he requested the Maharaja of Mysore to present a baby-elephant to the Durban Zoo. The Maharaja graciously consented, and the baby-elephant arrived duly. It was received and installed in the Durban Zoo with due ceremony, and named Nellie by its Superintendent and became one of the greatest of its attractions.

*Christianity*: C. E. Seldon, an American, had an interview with Sastri in Madras on January 22, 1926, in the course of which Sastri expressed high appreciation of the work of Christian missionaries in India; whereupon Seldon enquired why Sastri did not embrace Christianity. Bidding Seldon to put away his notebook and listen, Sastri administered him such a strong dose of undiluted *Advaita* philosophy that the American broke down, wept tears, caught hold of Sastri's hands, embraced him and said that he was blessed that day!<sup>6</sup>

*British Friends of India*: Sastri apprehended that in their pursuit of Indian nationalism, Indians might overlook, discount or disown British friends who served the cause of India. He wished that there should be at least one place in India where they would be remembered constantly and gratefully. He, therefore, procured the photographs of a number of Britishers like Charles Bradlaugh, Henry Fawcett, John Morley, Edwin S. Montagu, Mr. and Mrs. H. S. L. Polak and hung them in the office of the Servants of India Society's Headquarters in Poona.

*Photographs*: Sastri was photogenic, and he knew it. He

<sup>6</sup> Kodanda Rao's Diary, January 22, 1926.

was fond of presenting his photographs, sometimes autographed, to his friends who greatly appreciated his thoughtfulness and friendliness.

*Music, Pictures and Drama:* Sastri was a great connoisseur of South Indian Classical music and greatly enjoyed expert performances but without much outward expression. But he never cultivated a taste for Western music; it was just unpleasant noise to him! He loved the cinema and the stage and attended them pretty often, particularly in London. In South Africa his visits to them were few and far between, for special arrangements had to be made in advance to avoid incidents because of his race! In Madras his favourite relaxation in the evenings was to sit on the sands of the beautiful beach along with two or three favourite friends like T. R. Venkatarama Sastri and G. A. Natesan and discuss cabbages and kings with animation.

*Dress:* In his early days Sastri wore the traditional South Indian dress, consisting of *dhoti*, shirt and closed coat, with a turban on his head and *chappals* on his feet. It was simple and austere. It was only after he entered the legislatures and subsequently went abroad that he took to suits and shoes. On formal and semi-formal occasions he wore a long coat with closed collar and on other occasions a lounge suit with an open collar and tie. Normally he wore his white muslin turban, except during morning walks or when he did not wish to be noticed. On such occasions he wore a hat. After his visits to England, he became very particular about his "European" dress, and more so when he was in South Africa as the Agent-General of the Government of India. He had become almost a dandy from Bond Street! His tweed suits and his ties had to be pressed and his shoes polished every day! When he finally returned to India and to Madras in the evening of his life, he reverted to his "native" dress, more airy and comfortable in its moist tropical climate.

He recorded in his Diary (January 8, 1940) that he borrowed a pair of socks and shoes and braces for his interview with the Governor of Madras!

Sastri recalled an incident concerning dress which happened to him and developed his philosophy on the subject. An Indian friend, who had visited East Africa to

attend a session of the East African Indian Congress, related to him that when he arrived in Kenya dressed in *khaddar dhoti* and shirt, as became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, he was completely ignored by the Kenya Indians; but when he, on being advised to do so, changed into suit and shoes, he was given friendly recognition and helped in his mission which was to study the status of Indians in East Africa! Writing to him on December 10, 1924, Sastri said: "Don't break your heart over your conventional dress. If you live long enough and become famous enough and make yourself indispensable, you can dress some day as scantily and as originally as ever you please. Look at Mr. Gandhi. His dress is evolving in proportion to his fame—only as the latter increases the former decreases! But no smaller man dares keep step with him in that respect. Even Das and Nehru still cover a great part of their bodies. When you go out of India, you cannot afford to defy convention at all, unless you don't care for your specific mission and consider it sufficient just to defy convention and earn whatever notice that brings. It is a funny world we have to live in; bend first to it and become great; then you can make it bend to you. Did Gandhi always dress like this? If he had begun so, he would have ended differently."

A similar incident happened to Sastri himself in Calcutta in the first decade of the century when he was assisting Gokhale in his Council work, referred to earlier.

*Playing Cards:* To his puritanic heritage playing cards was next to sin, and he generally avoided it. In 1930, however, while voyaging to England for the first session of the Round Table Conference, he was induced by his colleagues on the boat to try his hand at the game of Bridge. In his letter dated April 28, 1930, he said: "I have fallen. You will see me at the bridge table, as intent on the game as if great stakes were on." But it never became a regular or absorbing habit with him.

In such matters Sastri progressed from austere self-denial to innocent self-enjoyment, but never descended to hedonistic self-indulgence.

*The Teaching Profession:* Sastri had a high regard for the teaching profession, to which he gave expression whenever occasion arose. In a letter dated March 29, 1923, he said:

"A teacher never need be ashamed, unless he proves false to his profession. My non-Brahmin un-friends here [Madras] always refer to me cynically as an ex-school-master—showing their contempt of the profession. To me it has always appeared that the disgrace lies in the *ex*. Why did I ever leave the noble work of Education? I sometimes question whether I have done anything better since."

*The Remorse of Bilderbeck:* Soon after Sastri received the Freedom of the City of London and made his Guildhall speech, he received a phone call from an Englishman, Mr. Bilderbeck, who said that he had called at the residence of Sastri to meet him personally, but having been denied admission for want of an engagement, had recourse to the telephone to contact Sastri. He warmly congratulated Sastri on his rise to eminence. Sastri immediately realised that the Englishman was his Principal when he was a College student and went out to meet him and was overwhelmed by the sight of the venerable old gentleman, perhaps in his nineties, and his great courtesy in calling on him. Sastri offered to pay his respects to his former Principal and his wife at their home, which was in a suburb of London. At the luncheon party, to which they had invited the leading men and women of the neighbourhood, Bilderbeck recalled an incident of long ago, during his Principalship in India. The dress regulations of the college required students to wear either shirts or coats or both. Sastri, who could not afford either and viewed with some awe those who could, used to wrap himself in a cheap towel. One rainy day he entered the class-room without the towel and explained to the critical Principal that it got drenched in the rain and he had, therefore, hung it on a nearby bush to dry and had no spare towel to take its place. Dissatisfied with the explanation, Bilderbeck fined him eight annas. Whereupon Sastri pleaded pitifully that if he could not afford a spare towel which cost only six annas, where was he to find eight annas for the fine? The same afternoon, when Mrs. Bilderbeck entered her husband's study with his tea, she discovered him praying on his bended knees to God to forgive him for his thoughtless act in fining poor Sastri. She advised him to cancel the fine forthwith. He did so and felt relieved. After recounting the incident, the Bilderbecks expressed their inexpressible gratification and joy that the "shirtless

Srinivasan" of his college days had blossomed into the "Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, Privy Councillor of the British Sovereign and Freeman of the City of London." It was one of Sastri's happiest and most moving experiences, which he was fond of sharing with his intimate friends.

In the Introduction I ventured to mention the confidence that I enjoyed of Sastri. Several of his letters quoted in the previous chapters were addressed to me. He was generous to me. When I lived with him and his family, he would not let me share the expenses of the household, though I too was getting an allowance from the Servants of India Society. When he discovered through his wife that I was secretly sharing the expenses, he pressed a refund on me and added affectionately that I was like a son to him. He took me with him wherever possible, without offending protocol. During the ten years that I was with him, I can recall only one occasion when I felt neglected by him. I was not admitted to the chamber of the Round Table Conference in London in 1931, while the secretaries of some other members were admitted. I nursed a grievance against him; only to discover soon after that he was more hurt because his request for my admission was ignored! The only occasion on which I felt somewhat mortified was when he chid me in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1928; only to discover that it was a diplomatic manoeuvre to appease some difficult but important local Indian leaders in a very trying situation!

The occasions when I was rather critical of him and his magnanimous response have been mentioned in the Introduction. Apart from these I cannot recall anything which in the least marred his affectionate consideration for me and my admiring devotion to him.

He released me from personal duty with him in 1932, as he felt that I should no longer lead a sheltered life but face public life on my own. We, however, kept in close touch through pretty continuous correspondence and occasional meetings.

In 1933 I received an invitation to spend the academic year 1934-35 in the Department of Race Relations at the Yale University in America. Sastri gave his blessing and led off with a cheque for Rs. 100 towards my travel expenses! Instead of cashing it, I preserved it as a memento. At Honolulu in 1936 I met an American, Miss Mary



Louise Campbell. She came to India in 1937, and we married in September of that year in Poona. In sending his blessings to us, he wrote to me on September 12, 1937:

“My whole heart goes out to you in the fullness of affection. I wish Miss Campbell and you every happiness and joy that life can give. May your mutual love never know a jar! May it ever increase and triumph over every obstacle that the envy of man or circumstance may place in its way!

“Once I gave you a cheque that under some romantic idea you did not use. I now replace it and trust you and your partner will convert it into something that may remind you of one far away no doubt, but bound to you by the close tie of an affection that nothing can dim and many dear memories of journeys, anxieties, ambitions, trials and enjoyments in common.”

## SUMMARY OF SASTRI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

*Racial Equality:* Sastri strove for racial equality generally and between the British and the Indian in particular. He secured the passage of his Resolution in the Imperial Conference of 1921 that it was desirable to recognise the right to citizenship of Indians lawfully domiciled in the British Dominions. All the Dominions, except South Africa, supported it at the time and in course of time implemented it.

Even South Africa endorsed the principle in the Cape Town Agreement when it said: "The Union Government firmly believe in and adhere to the principle that it is the duty of every civilised government to devise ways and means and take all possible steps for the uplifting of every section of their permanent population to the full extent of their capacity and opportunities, and accept the view that in the provision of educational and other facilities the considerable number of Indians who remain part of the permanent population should not be allowed to lag behind other sections of the people." Sastri was largely responsible for this Uplift Clause. Later South Africa repudiated the principle of racial equality and went in for *apartheid*.

*Commonwealth Migration:* Sastri acquiesced in the principle that each Dominion was free to restrict immigration from other Dominions. As it formed part of the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement in 1914, which was endorsed by Gokhale and later in 1918 by Lord Sinha at the Imperial War Conference, Sastri did not think it expedient to challenge it at the Imperial Conference of 1921. He, however, did not give up the hope that one day emigration would be free within

the whole of the Commonwealth.

*India and the Commonwealth:* Sastri firmly and fervently pleaded that India should remain in the Commonwealth and attain her ambition within it, notwithstanding disappointments and set-backs which, he believed, were far outweighed by its beneficent trends and achievements. He was an apostle of the Commonwealth at its best.

*Dominion Status:* Sastri pleaded passionately for Dominion Status for India immediately, subject to deductions in functions in the interests of India and at her request. He opposed the policy of gradual advance towards Dominion Status by steps which were to be determined by Britain after periodic reviews of India's fitness. He pleaded that Dominion Status should precede Dominion functions.

*Responsive vs. Responsible Government:* Until the Montagu Declaration of August 1917 Sastri favoured the "responsive" to the "responsible" type of government on the Swiss model. The executive and legislature should stay in office for the period fixed by the Constitution, like the American President and Congress, and the executive should conform to the wish of the elected legislature in case of disagreement. He thought that even in Britain the British parliamentary system had weaknesses, which would be exaggerated in India.

When the Montagu Declaration announced that "responsible" government was the goal of British policy in India, Sastri acquiesced in it on the ground of political expediency. Since British consent was necessary for India's political advance and as the British were proud of their parliamentary system, it was the path of prudence and of least resistance to accept what was offered rather than propose another system which was unfamiliar to the British and which would be exploited by India's enemies who were powerful enough even without an additional argument.

*Princely States:* Prior to the First Round Table Conference of 1930 Sastri expressed the view that the Princely States could not escape the democratic trends prevailing in British India, that some of them were viable enough to adopt democratic institutions and that the rest would have to merge

into larger viable units and lose their individuality and be reconciled to it.

*Unitary vs. Federal:* Until the First Round Table Conference Sastri envisaged the continuance of the Unitary Government of India, exercising paramountcy over the Princely States. The only major reform he desired was that the Government of India should be responsible to the Indian Legislature, elected by British India, and not to the British Parliament. He questioned the constitutional validity and the political expediency of the doctrine of direct relations of the Princes with the British Crown as distinguished from its agent, the Government of India.

At the first Round Table Conference, when the Princes offered to join British India to form a Federation and to support the demand for Dominion Status which would eliminate British hegemony, Sastri crossed the floor, as it were, and supported the Federation, notwithstanding that the Princes demanded some conditions which would weaken, if not defeat, democracy. As the British refused to pass on paramountcy to the Government of India responsible only to British India without the consent of the Princes, and as the Princes preferred the paramountcy of the British to the paramountcy of the Indian National Congress of Gandhi and Nehru, Dominion Status, with the elimination of British overlordship, was impracticable. To counter the Congress in the Indian legislature, the Princes, with the support of the British, insisted on nominating their representatives to the Legislature, which would militate against democracy. Sastri gave first priority to Dominion Status, and for the purpose, was willing to make some sacrifice and accept Federation and lesser democracy as a transitional measure even as he accepted communal electorates, which were equally undemocratic. He hoped that when the Dominion of India had a free hand, the anti-democratic elements would be eliminated sooner than later.

*Communal Problem:* Sastri acquiesced in communal representation for Muslims as a *fait accompli*. It could not be eliminated without the consent of the Muslims and of the British, and this consent was not forthcoming. He pleaded again and again that it should be acknowledged as an undemocratic evil, to be restricted as far as possible in extent

and in duration and to be eliminated as soon as possible. He would confine it to the legislatures and for a short period, but would not extend it to other institutions like municipalities, universities and other elected bodies. He pleaded that communal voting should not be compulsory, that individuals should be free to vote in the general or communal constituencies and change from the communal to the general, and that in any event, some places should be reserved for all communities to vote on a common register. As a better alternative, he pleaded for communal reservation in the legislatures elected on a common electoral roll. He also advocated that if the non-communal voting did not return the desired quota of Muslims, there should be a supplementary election of Muslims on a Muslim register.

*Constitutional Agitation:* Sastri supported constitutional agitation and opposed Non-cooperation and, more particularly, mass Civil Disobedience of laws which were not in themselves obnoxious but were selected as convenient for the purpose of Non-cooperation. He feared and anticipated that if the people were taught to disobey the law with a view to embarrassing the British, they would do the same later and embarrass government by Indians. The Dominion Government of India-to-be was storing up a legacy which it would regret.

Sastri anticipated in 1923 that, adopting constitutional methods, India was likely to attain her goal within twenty-five years, which would be 1948. She actually attained it in 1947.

*Civil Liberties:* Sastri opposed most strenuously the Rowlatt Act. When his Resolution on the Punjab tragedy was disallowed by the Governor-General in 1919, Sastri refused to move his other resolutions and left the chamber in protest. The Resolution, which he was not allowed to move, referred to the review of repressive laws by a committee and their repeal or amendment. He moved it as the first non-official Resolution in the Council of State under the Montagu Constitution on February 14, 1921, and it was accepted by Government.

In the Kamala Lectures, delivered at the Calcutta University, on the Rights and Duties of the Indian Citizen, he made a firm stand for the civil liberties of Indian

citizens.

*Partition:* Sastri firmly opposed the partition of India to create Pakistan.

*Rights of Women:* Sastri advocated equal rights and opportunities for women with men in education, professions, property, marriage and divorce. He favoured co-education and similar courses of study and opposed separate institutions and courses for women.

- 1916 Published *Self-Government for India under the British Flag*.  
Elected to the Imperial Legislative Council.
- 1917 Published *The Congress-League Scheme: An Exposition*.  
Welcomed E. S. Montagu's Declaration of Responsible Government for India as the goal of British policy.  
First interview with Montagu.
- 1918 Founded the *Servant of India*.  
Seceded from the Indian National Congress and helped to found the National Liberal Federation of India.  
Member of the Southborough Committee on Franchise.
- 1919 Opposed the Rowlatt Bills in the Indian Legislative Council.  
Evidence before the Joint Select Committee of British Parliament on the Montagu Bill.  
Attended the Congress in Amritsar and the Liberal Federation in Calcutta.
- 1920 Member of Committee to draft Rules under the Montagu Act.  
Opposed Congress Non-cooperation and Boycott of the Montagu Constitution.  
Elected to the Council of State.
- 1921 Moved Resolution in the Council of State on Repressive Laws.  
Secured the passage in the Imperial Conference, London, of his Resolution on equality of Citizenship in the British Dominions, South Africa dissenting.  
Made Member of the Privy Council.  
Received Freedom of the City of London.  
Member, India's Delegation to the League of Nations, Geneva.  
Head of India's Delegation to the Limitation of Armaments Conference. Washington, D.C., U.S.A.
- 1922 President, Bombay Provincial Liberal Conference.  
Tour of the Dominions of Australia, New Zealand and Canada.  
President, National Liberal Federation, Nagpur.
- 1923 Leader, Non-official Delegation to London regarding the status of Indians in Kenya.

- 1924 Opposed in the Council of State the Class Areas Bill in South Africa, and the British Government's policy in Kenya.  
Issued a statement immediately after Mahatma Gandhi's operation for appendicitis in Poona.  
Member of the Liberal Deputation to London for Dominion Status for India.  
Presided over All-Parties Conference, Bombay.
- 1925 Resigned Membership of Council of State due to ill health.  
Unveiled Montagu's statue in Bombay.
- 1926 Delivered the Kamala Lectures on Indian Citizenship at the Calcutta University.  
Lectures at Cochin on the Future of Indian States.  
Member, First Round Table Conference between India and South Africa.
- 1927 Agent of the Government of India in South Africa.
- 1929 Deputation to East Africa on Closer Union.  
Member, Royal Commission on Indian Labour.
- 1930 Member, First Round Table Conference between India and Britain.
- 1931 Promoted Gandhi-Irwin Negotiations.  
Evidence on East Africa before the Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament.  
Received the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh.  
Member, Second Round Table Conference between England and India.
- 1932 Member, Second Round Table Conference between India and South Africa in Cape Town.
- 1935 Lectures on Gokhale at the Mysore University.  
Vice-Chancellor, Annamalai University.
- 1936 Deputation to Malaya.
- 1937 Nominated to the Madras Legislative Council.
- 1938 Reappointed Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University but resigned in 1940.
- 1940 Delivered the Abhyambal Lectures at the Mysore University on the Rights of Women in India.
- 1941 Wrote a series of autobiographical articles in Tamil in the *Swadeshmitran*, Madras.



- 1943 Lectures on "Men I Have Known" and on Sir P. M. Mehta.  
Open Letters to the Secretary of State for India, the Viceroy of India and Mahatma Gandhi.
- 1944 Lectures on the *Ramayana*.
- 1945 Advocated that Mahatma Gandhi should attend the Peace Conference after the conclusion of the Second World War. Joint Statement opposing the Partition of India.
- 1946 Attack on General Smuts's apologia for Apartheid in South Africa.  
Death on 17th April.

